Studies in Hinduism

René Guénon

ISBN 81-215-1020-1
This edition 2002
Originally published in 1966
by Editions traditionnalles, Paris

© 2002, Munshiram Manoharlal Publishers Pvt. Ltd., New Delhi

All rights reserved including those of translations into other languages. No part of this book may be reproduced, stored in a retrieval system, or transmitted in any form, or by any means, electronic, mechanical, photocopying, recording or otherwise, without the written permission of the publisher.

Typeset, printed and published by
Munshiram Manoharlal Publishers Pvt. Ltd.,
Post Box 5715, 54 Rani Jhansi Road, New Delhi 110 055.

Contents

Introduction vii

1
Ātmā-Gītā 1

2
The Spirit of India 8

3
Kuṇḍalinī Yoga 19

4
The Indian Theory of the Five Elements 34

5
Dharma 57

6
Varṇa 62

7
Tantrism and Magic 68

8
The Fifth Veda 72

9

Nāma-Rūpa 79

10

Māyā 85

11

Sanātana Dharma 89

Index 100

Introduction

A NUMBER of Western scholars are attracted towards the ancient wisdom of India. A lot of work has been done and still is being done in different fields of Indology. These scholars appear to be very keen in exploring knowledge and searching truth in their sincere efforts to present before the modern world the precious achievements of Hindu civilization belonging to a time when the rest of the world was groping in the darkness of primitivism. It is true that Western intelligentsia attach value to modern scientific and technological achievements and are hopeful that the suppositions on which they are working will reveal such secrets of nature that will demolish all the ancient faiths and beliefs. But there are few who understand the ancient wisdom of Hindus and are of the opinion that the modern science devoted to materialism will ultimately lead the human being to chaos. In ancient India this phenomenon of materialism was experienced and has been referred to as *āsurī sampat* in the *Gītā*. *āsurī sampat* which when evolved to its climax throttles humanity.

Hindu scriptures, the contributions of sages who visualized the ultimate principles through their intuitive power (*ṛtambhara prajñā*), successfully unfold the science of *daivī sampat* (divine propriety) as a way out of the baneful influences of materialism.

The author of this book represents those who attach more importance to the divine fibre in mankind than the outward phenomenon of prosperity. This bold exposition of the truth might arise reactions in modern Indologists in India and abroad, but at

the same time compels the reader to see that the modern world at present is suffering from prosperity and not from poverty. But then all this cannot be challenged now because the author is no more in this world and his thoughts remain his last words on this subject.

1

Ātmā-Gītā[1]

In our most recent work we alluded to an interior* meaning of the *Bhagavadgītā* which, when it is looked at from this point of view, takes the name *Ātmā-Gītā*.[2] As we have been asked for

*The dichotomy Guénon has in mind in distinguishing the *interior* meaning from the *exterior* meaning of a work, is the one he elsewhere more literally styles as between the *esoteric* and the *exoteric* meaning of a work. He remarks, "we have had occasion to refer to the distinction...between what is called esoterism and exoterism, that is to say between two single aspects of a single doctrine, the one more interior and the other relatively exterior: such in fact is the whole literal meaning of the two terms. Exoterism, comprising the more elementary and easily understandable part of the teaching, which was consequently more readily brought within everybody's reach, is the only aspect to be expressed through the writings that have come down to us in a more or less complete form. Esoterism, being more profound and of a higher order, addressed itself as such only to regular disciples of the school who were specially prepared to receive it, and was the subject of a purely oral teaching, concerning which it has obviously not been possible to preserve very precise indications. Moreover, since we are here only concerned with a single doctrine regarded under two different aspects and having as it were two different levels of teaching, it should be clearly understood that these aspects could not in anyway be opposed to one another. The *esoteric* branch, by bringing to light the deeper meaning which the *exoteric* branch contained only virtually, developed and completed the doctrine which the latter had expounded in a rather vague, over-simplified and sometimes more or less symbolic form." *Introduction to the Study of the Hindu Doctrines*, tr.; Marco Pallis, pp. 158-59. Luzac, London, 1945; reprinted, New Delhi, 2000.

some explanation on this subject, we think it not inappropriate to give one here. The *Bhagavadgītā*, which is, as far as we know, an extract from the *Mahābhārata*,[3] has been translated so many times into European languages that it must surely be well-known to all. But this is of no matter since, truth to tell, none of these translations bears witness to a true understanding. Even the title is generally rendered somewhat inaccurately as 'Song of the Blessed One', for, in reality, the principal meaning of Bhāgavata is 'glorious' or 'venerable'. That of 'happy' also obtains, but in a secondary way, and moreover, it is, anyway, not wholly suitable in the context.[4] In fact, Bhāgavata is an epithet which applies to all the divine aspects, and also to those beings which are considered particularly worthy of veneration.[5] The idea of blessedness, which is anyway, basically, of a wholly individual and human order, is not necessarily found here. There is nothing surprising in the fact that this epithet be given notably to Kṛṣṇa, who is not only a venerable figure, but who, as the eighth *avatāra* of Viṣṇu, corresponds in reality to a divine aspect. But there is something else to consider here.

To understand this latter, we must remember that the two points of view, the Vaiṣṇavite and the Śaivaite, which correspond to two great paths befitting beings of different nature, each takes, as aid for lifting itself towards the Supreme Principle, one of two divine aspects, complementary in a certain way; and to which they owe their respective designations, transposing this aspect in such a way that they identify it with the Principle itself, seen without any restriction and beyond all determination or specification whatever. That is why the Śaivas call the Supreme Principle Mahādeva or Maheśvara, which is strictly an equivalent of Śiva, while the Vaiṣṇavas similarly call it by one of the names of Viṣṇu, like Narāyaṇa or Bhāgavata, the latter being used mostly by a particular branch whose representatives for this reason are called the Bhāgavatas. There is in all this, moreover no element of contradiction: names are multiple as are the paths

to which they correspond, but these paths all lead more or less directly to the same goal. Hindu doctrine knows nothing comparable to Western exclusivism, which insists that one and the same path must equally suit all beings, without taking any account of the differences in nature which exist between them.

Now, it will be easy to understand that Bhāgavata, being identified with the Supreme Principle, is for this very reason, none other than the unconditioned *ātmā*. And this is true in all cases, whether this *ātmā* be contemplated in the 'macrocosmic' order or in the 'microcosmic' one, according to which diverse point of view was being referring to. We clearly cannot consider repeating all the developments that we have already given elsewhere on this subject.[6] What interests us most directly here is the application which we might call 'microcosmic,' that is to say, that which is made to each being considered in its particularity. In this respect, Kṛṣṇa and Arjuna respectively represent the 'Self' and 'me,' personality and individuality, which are the unconditioned *ātmā* and *jīvātmā*. The teaching given by Kṛṣṇa and Arjuna is, from this interior point of view, that of suprarational intellectual intuition, whereby the 'Self' communicates with the 'me', when the latter is 'qualified' and prepared in such a way that this communication may be effectively established.

We must point out, for this is of the greatest importance in the context, that Kṛṣṇa and Arjuna are represented as mounted on the same chariot. This chariot is the 'vehicle' of being, viewed in its state of manifestation. And while Arjuna is fighting, Kṛṣṇa drives the chariot without fighting, that is, without himself engaging in action.[7] In fact, the battle in question symbolises action, in a very general way, and in a form appropriate to the nature and function of the Kṣatriyas, to whom the book is most especially devoted. The field of battle (*kṣetra*) is the domain of action through which the individual develops his possibilities. And this action in no way affects the principal being, permanent and immutable, but concerns only the individual 'living soul' (*jīvātmā*).

The two mounted on the same chariot are, thus, the same as the two birds spoken of in the Upaniṣads: "Two birds, inseparably united companions, live in the same tree; one eats the fruit of the tree, the other looks on without eating."[8] Here again, with a different symbolism representing action, the first of these two birds is *jīvātmā*, and the second is unconditioned *ātmā*. It is the same again for the 'two who entered the cave,' mentioned in another text.[9] And if these two are always closely united, that means that in reality they are but one with regard to absolute reality, for *jīvātmā* is distinguished from *ātmā* only in an illusory manner.

There is also, to express this union, and precisely in direct relation with the *Ātmā-Gītā*, a term which is particularly noteworthy: Naranārāyaṇa. We know that Nārāyaṇa, 'He who walks (or is carried) on the water,' is a name for Viṣṇu, applied by transposition to *paramātmā* or the Supreme Principle as we have already mentioned above. The waters here represent formal* or individual possibilities.[10] On the other hand, *nara* or *nṛ* is man, the individual being inasmuch as he belongs to the human race. And it is well to note the close relation that exists between this word and that of *nara*, which designates the waters.[11] But this would draw us too far afield from our subject. Thus, *nara* and Nārāyaṇa are respectively the individual and the Universal, the 'me' and the 'Self,' the manifest state of a being, and its non-manifest principle. And they are indissolubly reunited in the compound Naranārāyaṇa, which is sometimes spoken of as two ascetics living in the Himalayas, and which more particularly

*Guénon uses the terms 'formal' (formelle) and 'informal' (informelle) simply to mean 'formed' (or 'having form,' *rūpa*) and 'non-formed' (or 'not having form,' *arūpa*). The distinction normally in question is that between 'manifestation which has shape' (*rūpa*), and 'manifestation which has no shape' (*arūpa*). An instance of the latter might to be *tanmātras*, or 'subtle principles' which, though by no means *ultimate* principles, are nonetheless 'shapeless' until expressed and mingled to give rise to what we call, 'physical things'.

Though of course, the term 'non-formed' applies to the non-manifest also.

recalls the last Upaniṣadic text mentioned above, the text where the 'two who entered the cave' are at the same time designated as 'having their abode on the highest peak.'[12] In this same compound it is also declared that *nara* is Arjuna, and Nārāyaṇa is Kṛṣṇa. These are the two mounted on the same chariot, and always, under one name or another, and whatever the symbolic forms employed, *jīvātmā* and *paramātmā*.

These indications allow us to understand what is the interior meaning of the *Bhagavadgītā*, a meaning in relation to which all the others are, in sum, only more or less contingent applications. This is true notably of the social meaning in which the functions of contemplation and action, relating respectively to the supra-individual and the individual, are considered to be that of the Brāhmaṇa and the Kṣatriya.[13] It is said that the Brāhmaṇa is the type of fixed or immutable beings (*sthāvara*), and that the Kṣatriya is the type of mobile or changeable beings (*jaṅgama*).[14] We can easily see the analogy that holds between, on the one hand, these two classes of being, and, on the other, immutable personality and individuality subject to change. And this immediately establishes the link between this meaning and the preceding one. What is more, we see that precisely where the Kṣatriya is concerned, because action is his proper function, the latter may be taken as symbolising individuality whatever it be, which is necessarily also engaged in action by the very conditions of its existence. While the Brāhmaṇa, by virtue of his function of contemplation and pure knowledge, represents the higher states of being.[15] And thus we may say that every being has in itself the Brāhmaṇa and the Kṣatriya, but with a preponderance of one or other of the two natures, according to whether its tendencies draw it principally towards contemplation or towards action. We, thus, see that the scope of the teaching contained in the *Bhagavad-gītā* is far from being limited to Kṣatriya, taken in the proper sense, although the form through which this teaching is exposed is particularly appropriate to them. And if Occidentals, among

whom the Kṣatriya's nature is encountered much more frequently than that of the Brāhmaṇa, were to return to an understanding of traditional ideas, such a form is undoubtedly also the one that would be most immediately accessible to them.

References

1. Published in *Voile d'Isis*, March 1930.
2. *Spiritual Authority and Temporal Power*, ch. 5.
3. We recall that the two Itihāsas, that is the *Rāmāyaṇa* and the *Mahābhārata*, being part of the Smṛti, therefore, having the character of traditional writings, are something quite different to the simple 'epic poems', in the profane and literary sense, as Occidentals usually see them.
4. There is a certain kinship, which may lead to some confusion, between the roots *bhaj* and *bhuj*. The latter, whose primitive meaning is 'to eat', first of all expresses the ideas of enjoyment, possession, happiness; conversely, in the former and its derivatives, such as *bhaga* and particularly *bhakti*, the predominant ideas are of veneration, adoration, respect, devotion or attachment.
5. Buddhists naturally give this title to Buddha, and the Jainas similarly to their Tīrthaṅkaras.
6. For this and for what follows, we shall return particularly to the considerations that we expounded in *Man and His Becoming According to the Vedānta*.
7. It is to be noted that this meaning is also, more precisely, that of the Islamic conception of the 'holy war' (*jihād*); the social and exterior application is only secondary here, and what shows this clearly is that it only constitutes the 'small holy war' (*jihād-e saghīr*), while the 'great holy war' (*jihād-e kabīr*) is of a purely interior and spiritual order.
8. *Muṇḍaka Upaniṣad*, *muṇḍaka* 3, *khaṇḍa* 1, *śruti* 1; *Śvetāśvatara Upaniṣad*, *adhyāya* 4, *śruti* 6.
9. *Kaṭha Upaniṣad*, *adhyāya* 1, *vallī* 3, *śruti* 1. The 'cave' is but the cavity of the heart, which represents the place of the union of the individual with the universal, or of the 'me' with the 'Self'.
10. In the Christian tradition, Christ's walking on the waters has a meaning which exactly corresponds to the same symbolism.
11. Perhaps, among the Greeks, the names Nereus and Nereides, water nymphs, have some relationship with the Sanskrit *nāra*.

12. There is an indication here of the symbolic relationships of the cave and the mountain, to which we have had occasion to allude in *The King of the World*.
13. This is the point of view that we have developed particularly in *Spiritual Authority and Temporal Power*.
14. The totality of beings is sometimes designated by the compound *sthāvara-jaṅgama*.
15. That is why the Brāhmaṇa is designated as *deva* on earth, the *devas* corresponding to supra-individual or non-formed/informal states (although still manifest). This designation, which is strictly correct, appears never to have been understood by Occidentals.

2

The Spirit of India[1]

THE opposition of East and West, reduced to its most simple terms, is basically identical to that which one often likes to establish between contemplation and action. We have ourselves already explicated this subject time and again, and we have examined the different standpoints one may adopt to view the relations between these two terms. Are these really two contraries, or should they not rather be two complementaries, or yet again should there not, in reality, be between them a relation, not of coordination, but of subordination? We will here, therefore, only very rapidly summarise these considerations, indispensable to anyone seeking to comprehend the spirit of the East in general and that of India in particular.

The viewpoint that consists in purely and simply opposing contemplation to action is the most exterior and superficial of all. The opposition clearly holds in appearance, but it cannot be utterly irreducible; moreover, one may say as much for all the contraries which cease to be such as soon as one rises beyond a certain level, wherein their opposition has its entire reality. He who speaks of opposition or contrast speaks at the same time of disharmony or disequilibrium, that is to say something which cannot exist but form a particular and limited viewpoint. In the totality of things, equilibrium is made of the sum of all

disequilibria, and all partial disorders, no matter what, combine in the total order.

When considering contemplation and action as complementary, one already assumes a more profound and true viewpoint than the preceding one, because the opposition is therein found reconciled and resolved, these two terms in a certain way balancing off each other. It is a question then of two equally necessary elements which are mutually complete and dependent, and which constitute the double activity, interior and exterior, of one and the same being, whether this be everyman taken individually or humanity viewed collectively. This conception is certainly more harmonious and satisfactory than the former; if one were to hold to it exclusively, one would be tempted, by virtue of the correlation, thus, established, to place contemplation and action on the same plane, so that one would only have to strive to hold the balance between them as steady as possible without ever posing the question of a possible superiority of the one in relation to the other. Now, indeed, this question has always come up, and in what concerns the antithesis of East and West we can say that it consists precisely in that the East maintains the superiority of contemplation, while the West, and especially the modern West, conversely affirms the superiority of action over contemplation. It is no longer here a question of viewpoints, each of which could have its own *raison d'être* and be accepted at least as the expression of a relative truth. A relationship of subordination being irreversible, the two conceptions in confrontation are really contradictory, thus, exclusives the one of the other, so that necessarily one is true and the other false. We must choose, and perhaps the necessity of this choice has never been imposed with as much force and urgency as in the present circumstances; perhaps it will impose itself even more forcefully in the near future.

In those of our works alluded to above,[2] we have shown that contemplation is superior to action, as the immutable is superior

to change. Action, being only a transitory and momentary modification of being, cannot have in itself its principle and sufficient reason. If it does not cling to a principle which is beyond its contingent domain, it is but pure illusion. And this principle from which it draws all the realities of which it is capable, as well as its existence and its very possibility, can only be found in contemplation, or, if preferred, in knowledge. Similarly, change, in its most general sense, is unintelligible and contradictory, that is to say, impossible, without a principle from which to proceed and which, by the very fact that it is its principle, cannot be subjected to it and is, therefore, necessarily immutable. And that is why in Western Antiquity Aristotle affirmed the necessity of an 'unmoved mover' of all things. It is obvious that action belongs to the world of change, of 'becoming'. Knowledge alone allows us to leave this world and the limitations which are inherent therein, and once it attains the immutable, it itself possesses immutability, for all knowledges are essentially identification with its subject. It is precisely of this that Occidentals are ignorant, who, so for as knowledge is concerned, envisage only a knowledge which is rational and discursive, therefore indirect and imperfect, that which one might call a knowledge by reflection: and which, more and more, they value—even this inferior knowledge—only in the measure that it can directly serve practical ends. Engaged in action to the point of denying everything that goes beyond it, they do not perceive that this very action, thus, degenerates, by default of a principle, into an agitation as useless as it is sterile.

In the social organisation of India, which is but an application of metaphysical doctrine to the human order, the relations between knowledge and action are represented by those of the first two castes, the Brāhmaṇas and the Kṣatriyas, whose proper functions they are respectively. It is said that the Brāhmaṇa is the type of fixed beings, and that the Kṣatriya is the type of mobile or changeable beings. Thus, all the beings in this world, according to their nature, are principally related to one or the other, for

there is a perfect correspondence between the cosmic order and the human order. It is not, of course, that action is forbidden to the Brāhmaṇa, nor knowledge to the Kṣatriya, but they befit them in a certain manner by accident and not essentially. *Svadharma*, the true law of caste, in conformity with the nature of the being to which it belongs, lies in knowledge for the Brāhmaṇa, in action for the Kṣatriya. That is why the Brāhmaṇa is superior to the Kṣatriya, as knowledge is superior to action; in other words, spiritual authority is superior to temporal power. And it is by recognising its subordination in relation to the former that the latter will be legitimate, that is to say, that it will really be what it should be. Otherwise, becoming separate from its principle, it cannot but operate in a disorderly fashion which will end in fatal ruin.

To the Kṣatriya normally belongs all exterior powers, since the domain of action is the exterior world; but this power is nothing without an interior, purely spiritual principle, which incarnates the Brāhmaṇas' authority, and in which it finds its only valid guarantee. In exchange for this guarantee, the Kṣatriyas must, with the help of the might they wield, assure the Brāhmaṇas the means of accomplishing in peace, sheltered from trouble and strife, their proper function of knowledge and teaching. This is what is represented in the figure of Skanda, the Lord of war, protecting the meditation of Gaṇeśa, the Lord of knowledge. Such are the normal relations of spiritual authority and temporal power. And if they were always and everywhere observed, no conflict could ever arise between the two, each occupying the place which must be due to it by virtue of the hierarchy of functions and beings, a hierarchy in strict conformity with the nature of things. We can see that the place given to the Kṣatriyas, and consequently to action, while being subordinate, is far from being negligible, since it covers all exterior powers, at once military, administrative and judicial, which is synthesised in the royal function. The Brāhmaṇas have to exercise only an invisible

authority, which, as such, may be unknown to the vulgar, but which, is nonetheless the principle of all visible powers. This authority is like the pivot around which all things turn, the fixed axis around which the world completes its revolution, the immutable centre that directs and regulates the cosmic movement without itself taking part in it. And this is what is represented by the ancient symbol of the *swastika*, which is, for this reason, one of the attributes of Gaṇeśa.

It should be added that the place which must be give to action will, in the event, be more or less large according to circumstance. This is, indeed, as true of peoples as of individuals; and whilst the nature of some is mostly contemplative, that of others is mostly active. There is undoubtedly no country where the aptitude for contemplation is as widespread and as generally developed as India. And that is why India can be considered the supreme representative of the Eastern spirit. Conversely, among Western peoples, most certainly it is the aptitude for action that predominates for the majority of men. And even if this tendencies were not as exaggerated and deviant as it presently is, it would nevertheless subsist, such that contemplation could never here be more than the affair of a very limited élite. This would suffice, however, for all to return to order, for spiritual power, quite the contrary to material might, is not at all based on number. But, at the present time, Occidentals are in reality mere men without caste, not one of whom occupies the place and function best befitting his nature. This very disorder, it is necessary not to conceal, is spreading rapidly and even seems to be gaining on the East, although it still affects it only in a very superficial and much more limited fashion than could be imagined by those who, only knowing more or less Westernised Orientals, are not themselves aware of the small importance these have in the wider reality. It is not for that less true, though, that there is a danger here which, despite everything, risks being aggravated, at least temporarily. The 'Western peril' is not an empty phrase, and the

West, which is itself its first victim, seems to want to drag humanity, total and entire, into that very ruin by which it is threatened through its own error.

This peril is that of disorderly action, because it is deprived of its principle; such an action is but in itself a pure nothingness, and it can only lead to catastrophe. Yet it will be said that, if this exists, it is because this very disorder must finally return to that universal order, of which it is an element, with as much claim as all the rest; and from a higher point of view, this is strictly true. All beings, whether they know it or not, whether they will it or not, totally depend on their principle for everything they are. Disorderly action is itself possible only through the principle of all actions, but because it does not recognise the dependence that it has on it, it is without order and without positive effectiveness, and, if one may so put it, it only possesses the lowest degree of reality, the one that is closest to pure and simple illusion, precisely because it is furthest from principle, in which alone resides absolute reality. From the viewpoint of principle, there is only order; but, from the viewpoint of contingencies, disorder reigns, and, where earthly humanity is concerned, we are in an epoch when this disorder appears to be triumphant.

One may ask why it is thus, and Hindu doctrine provides, with the theory of cosmic cycles, an answer to this question. We are in the Kaliyuga, in a dark age when spirituality is reduced to a minimum by the very laws of the development of the human cycle, bringing a sort of progressive materialisation through different periods, among which it is the last. By human cycle, we means here only the duration of a *manvantara*. Towards the end of this age, everything is merged, the castes are mixed even the family no longer exists; is not this exactly what we see around us? Must we conclude from this that the present cycle is effectively drawing to its end, and that soon we will see breaking the dawn of a new *manvantara*? We would be tempted to believe

this, particularly if we think of the growing speed with which events rush along; but perhaps this disorder has not yet reached its ultimate point, perhaps humanity must descend even lower, in the excesses of a totally material civilization, before being able to climb back up again towards principle and towards spiritual and divine realities. However, it matters little; whether it be a little earlier or a little later, this descending development that modern Occidentals call 'progress' will find its limit, and then the 'black age' will end; then will appear the Kalkin *avatāra*, the one who is mounted on a white horse, bearing on his head a triple diadem, sign of sovereignty over the three worlds, and holding in his hand a sword flaming like the tail of a comet. Then the world of disorder and error will be destroyed, and by the purifying and regenerative power of *agni* all things will be reestablished and restored in the wholeness of their original state, the end of the present cycle being also the beginning of the future cycle. Those who knows that it must be cannot, even at the heart of the worst confusion, lose their immutable serenity. However, irksome it be to live in an epoch of trouble and almost general obscurity, they cannot be affected by it deep in themselves, and it is here that we find the strength of the true élite. Undoubtedly, if the darkness should continue to spread more and more, this élite could, even in the East, become reduced to a very small number. But it is enough that some preserve integrally the true knowledge to be ready, when the ages are completed, to save all that can still be saved from the present world and become the seed of the future world.

This role of conservation of the traditional spirit, with everything that it implies in reality when we understand it in its most profound sense, the East alone can at present fulfil. We do not wish to say the whole of the East, since unfortunately the disorder stemming from the West may reach it in certain of its elements. But it is only in the East that there still survives a true élite, where the traditional spirit rediscovers itself with all its

vitality. Elsewhere, what remains of it is reduced to those exterior forms whose significance has already, and for a long time, been all but misconstrued; and, if something of the West can be saved, this will only prove possible with the aid of the East. Yet again, it is necessary that this aid, to be effective, find a point of support in the Western world; and these are precisely those possibilities which it would at present be most difficult to define.

Whatever the case, India has in a certain sense, in the whole of the East, a privileged position due to the relationship that we have in mind, and the reason for this is that, without the traditional spirit, India would no longer be anything. Indeed, Hindu unity (we do not say Indian unity) is not a unity of race or language; it is exclusively a unity of tradition. They are Hindu who effectively adhere to this tradition, and they alone. This explains what we said before about the aptitude for contemplation, more general in India than anywhere else; the participation in tradition, indeed, is only fully effective to the degree that it implies an understanding of doctrine, and doctrine consists primarily of metaphysical knowledge, since it is in pure metaphysical order that is found the principle from which all else derives. That is why India appears more particularly destined to uphold to the end the supremacy of contemplation over action, to oppose with its élite, an insuperable barrier to the encroachment of the modern Western spirit, to preserve intact, at the centre of a world troubled by constant change, an awareness of the permanent, the immutable and the eternal.

It must be understood, however, that what is immutable is the principle itself, and that the applications which it produces in all domains can and even must vary according to circumstance and epoch, for, while principle is absolute, the applications are as relative and as contingent as the world to which they relate. Tradition allows adaptations that are indefinitely multiple and various in their modalities. But all these adaptations, as soon as they are made strictly according to the traditional spirit, are

nothing but the normal development of certain consequences that are eternally contained in principle. It is, therefore, only a question, in all cases, of making explicit what was hitherto implicit, and, thus, the basis, the very substance of doctrine, always remains identical under all the differences of exterior form. The applications can be very varied; such are, notably, not only the social institutions, to which we have already alluded, but also the sciences, when they are truly what they must be. And this shows the essential difference that exists between the conception of these traditional sciences and that of the sciences such as have been constituted by the modern Western spirit. While the former derive all their values from their attachment to metaphysical doctrine, the latter, under the pretext of independence, are narrowly close in upon themselves and can at best pretend to surge ever forwards, without, though, either leaving their bounded domain or pushing its frontiers back a single pace, a movement which could perpetuate itself in this way indefinitely without our being one jot more advanced in the true knowledge of things. Is it from an obscure feeling of helplessness that the moderns have come to prefer research to knowledge, or is it simply because this endless research satisfies their need for incessant agitation which wills to be an end in itself? What could Orientals make of these empty sciences the West claims to bring them, when they possess other sciences incomparably more real and vast and about which the least effort at intellectual concentration teaches them much more than all these fragmentary and scattered views, this chaotic accumulation of facts and notions which are connected only by more or less whimsical hypotheses, laboriously set-up only to be at once overthrown and replaced by others with no better foundation? One must not praise too inordinately, in the belief that this compensates for all their shortcomings, the industrial and technical applications to which these sciences have given birth. No one dreams of contesting that they have at least this practical usefulness, even if their

speculative value is rather illusory. But this is something that would never really interest the East, since it puts too little value on these totally material advantages to sacrifice its spirit to them, because it knows what is the immense superiority of the viewpoint of contemplation over that of action, and that all things that pass are but nothing in the sight of the eternal.

The true India for us is not, therefore, that more or less modernised, that is to say Westernised, India as dreamed of by some young people raised in European and American universities, and who, however, proud they are of the totally exterior knowledge they have acquired there, are, however, from the Eastern viewpoint, merely and absolutely ignorant, constituting, despite their claim, the very opposite of an intellectual élite in our sense. The true India is the one that remains always faithful to the teachings that its élite hands down to itself through the centuries: it is the one that integrally preserves the repository of a tradition whose source goes back higher and further than humanity. It is the India of Manu and the *ṛṣis*, the India of Śrī Rāma and Śrī Kṛṣṇa. We know that it was not always the country that is designated today by this name. There is no doubt even that, since the primitive Arctic sojourn spoken of in the Veda, it has successively occupied many different geographical positions. Perhaps it will occupy still others, but it matters little: for it is always there where we find the abode of this great tradition whose maintenance among men is its mission and its *raison d'être*. Through the uninterrupted chain of its sages, its gurus and its yogis, it survives through all the vicissitudes of the exterior world, unshakable as Meru. It will last as long as the *sanātana dharma* (which we could translate as *Lex Perennis*, which as much accuracy as a Western language permits) and never will it cease contemplating all things, by the frontal eye of Śiva, in the serene immutability of the eternal present. All hostile efforts will finally break against the single force of truth, as the clouds melt before the sun, even if they came momentarily to obscure it to

our gaze. The destructive action of time only allows what is superior to time to survive: it will devour all those who have restricted their horizon to the world of change and placed all realities in becoming, those who have made themselves a religion out of the contingent and the transitory, for 'he who sacrifices to a god will become the food of this god'; but how can it prevail against those who bear in themselves an awareness of eternity?

References

1. Published in *Le Monde Nouveau*, June 1930.
2. *East and West: The Crisis of the Modern World: Spiritual Authority and Temporal Power.*

3

Kuṇḍalinī Yoga[1]

We have already, on several occasions, mentioned here the works of Arthur Avalon (Sir John Woodroffe), devoted to one of the least known aspects of Hindu doctrine. What one calls 'tantrism', because it is based on treatises designated by the generic term tantras, and which is, moreover, much more widespread and less clearly delimited than one ordinarily believes, has always been, if fact, almost completely left to one side by Orientalists, who have been put off it, both by the difficulty of its comprehension and by certain prejudices, the latter being, moreover, but the direct consequence of their incomprehension. One of the principal works, entitled, *The Serpent Power*, has recently been republished.[2] We do not intend to develop its analysis here, which would be almost impossible and, moreover, of little interest. (Much better, for those of our readers who know English, to refer to the volume itself, of which we could only ever give but an incomplete idea.) We would rather make explicit the true significance of what is treated there, without tying ourselves down, moreover, to the order in which the questions have been expounded.[3]

We must say, first of all, that we cannot completely agree with the author on the fundamental meaning of the word *yoga*, which literally meaning 'union', could not be understood if it did

not apply essentially to the supreme goal of all 'realisations'. To this he objects that there can be no question of union except between two distinct beings, and that *jīvātmā* is not at all really distinct from *paramātmā*.

This is perfectly correct, but, though the individual is itself only, in fact, distinguished from the Universal in illusory mode, we must not forget that it is the individual from which all 'realisation' flows perforce—the word itself would otherwise have no *raison d'être*; and that, from this point of view, the latter gives the appearance of a 'union', which, truth to tell, is in no way something 'that must be accomplished', but only a conscious grasping of 'what is', that is to say of the 'Supreme Identity'. A term such as yoga, therefore, expresses the aspect taken by things seen from the side of manifestation, and which is as obviously and equally illusory as this manifestation itself. But it is the same, inevitably, for all forms of language, since they belong to the domain of individual manifestation, and it suffices to be warned of this not to be led into error by their imperfection, nor tempted to see there the expression of a real 'dualism'. It is only secondarily and by extension that this same word yoga can then be applied to a collection of different means employed in attaining 'realisation', means that are only preparatory and to which the name 'union', in whatever way this may be understood, does not properly fit. But all this, moreover, does not affect at all the account of what is in question, for, as soon as the word yoga is preceded by a qualifier, so as to distinguish several sorts, it is very evident that it is used to designate means, which alone are multiple, while the goal is necessarily one and the same in all cases.

The type of yoga in question here connects with what is called *laya-yoga*, and which consists essentially in a process of 'dissolution' (*laya*), that is to say, reabsorption in the non-manifested, of the different elements constitutive of individual manifestation, this reabsorption taking place gradually following

an order that is strictly inverse to the order of production (*sṛṣṭi*) or development (*prapañca*) of this manifestation.[4] The elements or principles in question are the *tattvas* which Sāṁkhya enumerates as a production of *prakṛti* under the influence of *puruṣa*: the 'inner sense', that is to say the 'mental' (*manas*), joins with individual consciousness (*ahaṁkāra*), and by its intermediation, with the intellect (*buddhi* or *mahat*); the five *tanmātras* or elementary subtle essences; the five faculties of sensation (*jñānendriyas*), and the five faculties of action (*karmendriyas*)[5]; finally, the five *bhūtas* or corporeal elements.[6] Every *bhūta*, with the *tanmātra* to which it corresponds and the faculties of sensation and action which proceed from the latter, is reabsorbed in the one immediately preceding it in the order of production, so that the order of reabsorption is as follows: first, earth (*pṛthvī*), with the olfactory quality (*gandha*), the sense of smell (*ghrāṇa*) and the faculty of locomotion (*pāda*); second, water (*ap*), with the palatable quality (*rasa*), the sense of taste (*rasanā*) and the faculty of prehension (*pāṇi*); third, fire (*tejas*), with the visual quality (*rūpa*), the sense of vision (*cakṣus*) and the faculty of excretion (*pāyu*); fourth, air (*vāyu*), with the tactile quality (*sparśa*), the sense of touch (*tvac*), and the faculty of generation (*upastha*); fifth, ether (*ākāśa*), with the sonorous quality (*śabda*), the sense of hearing (*śrotra*), and the faculty of speech (*vāc*); and finally, at the last stage, all is reabsorbed in the 'inner sense' (*manas*). All individual manifestation is, thus, found reduced to its first term, as if concentrated at a point beyond which the being passes into another domain. Such, then, will be the six preparatory phases that must be successively traversed by the man who follows this way of 'dissolution', thus, ridding himself gradually of the different conditions limiting individuality, before reaching the supra-individual state where may be realised, in Pure Consciousness (*cit*), whole and unformed, total and informal, effective union with the Supreme Self (*paramātmā*), a union from which Deliverance (*mokṣa*) immediately results.

To understand clearly what is to follow, it is important never to lose from view, the notion of the analogy constitutive of 'macrocosm' by virtue of which all that exists in the Universe is also found in a certain fashion in man, that which the *Viśvasāra Tantra* expresses in these terms: 'What is here is there, what is not here is nowhere' (*yad ihāsti tad anyatra, yan nehāstri na tat kvacit*). It should be added that, by virtue of the correspondence existing between all states of existence, each of them contains in some way in itself a sort of reflection of all others, which allows us 'to situate' (for example, in the domain of gross manifestation whether one views it in the cosmic whole or in the human body), 'regions' corresponding to different modalities of subtle manifestation, and even to a whole hierarchy of 'worlds' which represent so many different phases in universal existence.

This said, it is easy to grasp that there are 'centres' in the human being corresponding respectively to each of the groups of *tattvas* enumerated by us, and that these centres, although belonging essentially to the subtle form (*sūkṣma-śarīra*), may in a certain sense be 'localized' in the corporeal or gross form (*sthūla-śarīra*), or, to say it better, *in relation to* different parts of the latter, these 'localisations' in reality being but another way of expressing those correspondences of which we have just spoken, correspondences, moreover, which imply a very real and special link between such a subtle centre and each such determinate part of the corporeal organism. It is, thus, that the six centres in question are related to the divisions of the vertebral column, called *meru-daṇḍa* because it constitutes the axis of the human body, just as, from the 'macrocosmic' point of view, *meru* is the 'axis of the world'[7]: the first five, in ascending sense, correspond respectively to the coccyginal, sacral, lumbar, torsal and cervical regions, and the sixth to the encephalic part of the central nervous system. But it must be clearly understood that they are not at all nervous centres, in the physiological sense of this word, and that one must in no way assimilate them to different

plexuses as some have claimed (which is, moreover, in formal contradiction with their 'localisation' inside the vertebral column itself), for it is not at all here a question of an identity but only of a relation between two distinct orders of manifestation, a relation furthermore that is sufficiently justified by the fact that it is precisely by means of the nervous system that one of the most direct liaisons of the corporeal state and subtle state is established.[8]

Similarly, the subtle 'channels' (*nāḍīs*) are no more nerves than they are blood vessels; they are, one may say, 'the lines of direction that the vital forces follow'. Of these 'channels', the three principal ones are *suṣumnā*, which occupies the central position, *iḍā* and *piṅgalā*, the two *nāḍīs* on the left and right, the former feminine or negative, the latter masculine or positive, these last two accordingly corresponding to a 'polarisation' of vital currents. *Suṣumnā* is 'situated' inside the cerebro-spinal axis, extending to the orifice that corresponds to the coronal of the head (*brahma-randhra*). *Iḍā* and *piṅgalā* are outside this same axis, around which they criss-cross in a sort of double helical coil, to end respectively at the two nostrils left and right, being thus connected with the alternated respiration of one then the other nostril.[9] It is along the course of the *suṣumnā*, and still more exactly, *inside* it (for it is described as enclosing two other concentric and more slender 'channels' called *vajra* and *citā*),[10] that are placed the 'centres' we have mentioned. And as *suṣumnā* is itself—'localised' in the medullary channel, it is quite obvious that there can be no question here at all of any corporeal organs.

These centres are called 'wheels' (*cakras*), and are also described as 'lotuses' (*padmas*), each of which has a determinate number of petals (radiating in the interval comprised between *vajra* and *citra*, that is to say, inside the first and around the second). The six *cakras* are: *mūlādhāra*, at the base of the vertebral column; *svādhiṣṭhāna*, corresponding to the abdominal region; *maṇipūra*, to the umbilical region; *anāhata*, to the region of the

heart; *viśuddha*, to the region of the throat; *ājñā*, to the region situated between the two eyes, that is to say, to the 'third eye';[11] and finally, at the summit of the head, around the *brahma-randhara* is a seventh 'lotus', *sahasrāra* or the 'lotus of a thousand petals', which is not counted among the *cakras*, because, as we will see later, it relates, as the 'centre of consciousness', to a state that is beyond the limits of individuality. According to the description given of meditation (*dhyāna*), each lotus carries in its pericarp the *yantra* or geometric symbol of the corresponding *bhūta*, in which is the latter's *bīja-mantra*, supported by its symbolic vehicle (*vāhana*). There also resides a 'deity' (*devatā*) accompanied by a particular *śakti*. The 'deities' who preside over the six *cakras*, and who are nothing but the 'forms of consciousness' through which the being passes to the corresponding stages, are respectively, in ascending order, Brahmā, Viṣṇu, Rudra, Īśa, Sadāśiva, and Śambhu, who have on the other hand, from the 'macrocosmic' point of view, their abodes in the six 'world' (*lokas*) hierarchically superimposed: *bhūrloka*, *bhuvarloka*, *svarloka*, *janaloka*, *tapoloka*, and *maharloka*. At *sahasrāra* presides Paramaśiva, whose abode is the *satyaloka*. Thus, all these worlds have their correspondences in the 'centre of consciousness' of the human being, following the analogical principle we have previously indicated. Finally, everyone of the petals of the different 'lotuses' carries one of the letters of the Sanskrit alphabet, or it would be more accurate to say that the petals are the letters themselves.[12] But it would be of little use now to go into more detail on this subject, and the necessary complements regarding this will be better placed in the second part of our study, when *kuṇḍalinī*, of which we have as yet not spoken, will have been explained.

Kuṇḍalinī is an aspect of *śakti* considered as cosmic force: it is, one might say, this force itself in so far as it resides in the human being, where it acts as vital force; and this name *kuṇḍalinī* signifies that it is represented as coiled about itself in the fashion

of a serpent. Its most general manifestations, moreover, occur in the form of a spiral movement developing from a central point which is its 'pole'.[13] The 'coiling' symbolises a state of rest, that of a 'static' energy from which proceed all forms of manifest activity. In other words, all vital forces more or less specialised, which are constant in action in human individuality, under its double subtle and corporeal modality, are only secondary aspects of this same *śakti* which in itself, as *kuṇḍalinī*, remains immobile in the 'centre-root' (*mūlādhāra*), as base and support of all individual manifestation. When it is 'awaken', it unwinds and moves following an upward direction, reabsorbing into itself these diverse secondary *śaktis* as it crosses the different centres of which we have previously spoken, until it finally unites with the Paramaśiva in the 'lotus of a thousand petals' (*sahasrāra*).

The nature of *kuṇḍalinī* is described as being at once luminous (*jyotirmayī*) and sonorous (*śabdamayī* or *mantramayī*). We know that 'luminosity' is considered as properly characterising the subtle state; and also know the primordial role of sound in the cosmogonic process. There would also be much to say from the same cosmogonic point of view, about the close connection that exists between sound and light.[14] We cannot expatiate here on the very complex theory of sound (*śabda*) and its different modalities, *parā* or non-manifested *paśyanti* and *madhyamā*, both belonging to the subtle order, and finally *vaikharī* (which is articulated speech), a theory on which the whole science of mantra (*mantra-vidyā*) rests; but he would remark that it is this that explains, not only the presence of the *bīja-mantras* of the elements inside the 'lotuses', but also the presence of the letters on their petals. It must be clearly understood, in fact, that it is not a question here of letters as written characters, nor even of articulated sounds perceived by the ear. But these letters are seen as the *bīja-mantras* or 'natural names' of all the activities (*kriyā*) connected with the *tattva* of the corresponding centre, or as the expressions in gross sound (*vaikharī-śabda*) of the subtle sounds produced by the forces that constitute these activities.

Kuṇḍalinī, as long as it remains in its state of rest, resides in the *mūladhāra-cakra*, which is, as we have said, the centre 'localised' at the base of the vertebral column, and which is the root (*mūla*) of *suṣumnā* and all the *nāḍīs*. Here is found the triangle (*trikoṇa*) called *traipura*,[15] which is the seat of the *śakti* (*śakti-pīṭha*). The latter is coiled there three and half times[16] around the symbolic *liṅga* of Śiva, designated as *Svayambhu*, covering with his head the *brahmadvāra*, that is to say the entrance to *suṣumnā*.[17] There are two other *liṅgas*, one (*bāna*) in the *anāhata-cakra*, and the other (*hara*) in the *ājñā-cakra*. They correspond to the principal 'vital knots' (*granthis*), whose passage constitutes what one may call the 'critical points' in the process of *kuṇḍalinī-yoga*.[18] And there is finally a fourth (*para*) in *sahasrāra* abode of Paramaśiva.

When the *kuṇḍalinī* is 'awakened' by the appropriate practices, whose description we will not go into, it penetrates inside the *suṣumnā*, and, during its ascent, successively 'pierces' the different 'lotuses', that blossom with its passing. And as it successively reaches each centre, it reabsorbs in it, as we have already said, the different principles of individual manifestation which are specially linked to this centre, and which brought, thus, to the potential state, are drawn with it into its movement towards the superior centre. These are so many stages of *laya-yoga*. To each of these stages is related also the obtaining of certain particular 'powers' (*siddhis*), but it is important to note that this is not at all what constitutes its essential, and one cannot insist too much on this, for the general tendency of Westerners is to attribute to these sorts of things, as indeed to all that is 'phenomenal', an importance they do not and cannot possess in reality. As the author very correctly points out, the *yogī* (or, to speak more accurately, he who is on the way to becoming one) does not aspire to possess any conditioned state, even a superior or 'celestial' state, so elevated even as that may be, but aspires only after 'deliverance'. All the greater reason then for him not to

become attached to 'powers' whose exercise emerges entirely from the domain of the most exterior manifestation. He who seeks these 'powers' for themselves and who makes of them the goal of his development, instead of seeing in them only simple accidental results, will never be a true yogi, for they will constitute for him unsurmountable obstacles, hindering him from continuing to follow the ascending path to its final end. His whole 'realisation' will only, therefore, consist of certain extensions of human individuality, a result whose value is strictly zero in light of the supreme goal. Normally the 'powers' in question must only be regarded as signs indicating that the being has effectively reached such and such a stage. It is, if one wishes, and external means of control. But what really matters, at whatever stage it may be, is a certain 'state of consciousness' represented, as we have said, by a 'deity' (*devatā*) with which the being identifies at this level of 'realisation'. And these states themselves have value only as a gradual preparation for the supreme 'union', which has no common measure with them, for there can be none between the conditioned and the unconditioned.

We will not repeat here the enumeration, which we have already given in the first part of this study, of the centres corresponding to the five *bhūtas* and their respective 'localisations'.[19] They relate to the different degrees of corporeal manifestation, and in the passage from one to the next, each group of *tattvas* is 'dissolved' in the group immediately above, the more gross always being reabsorbed into the more subtle (*sthūlānām sūkṣme layaḥ*). In the last place comes the *ājñā-cakra*, where one found the subtle *tattvas* of the 'mental' order, and in the pericap whose sacred monosyllable is *Oṁ*. This centre is so-called because it is here that is received from above (that is from the supra-individual domain) the command (*ājñā*) of the internal guru, who is Paramaśiva, with whom the 'Self' is identical in reality.[20] The 'localisation' of this *cakra* is in direct relation with the 'third eye', which is the 'eye of knowledge' (*jñāna-cakṣus*). The corres-

ponding cerebral centre is the pineal gland, which is not at all the 'seat of the soul' according to the truly absurd conception of Descartes, but which has nonetheless a particularly important role as organ of connection with the extracorporeal modalities of the human being. As we have explained elsewhere, the function of the 'third eye' essentially refers to the 'sense of eternity' and the restoration of the 'primordial state' (whose relation with *haṁsa* we have also indicated on several occasions, under whose form Paramaśiva is said to manifest Himself in this centre). The stage of 'realisation' corresponding to *ājñā-cakra* implies, therefore, the perfection of the human state, and this is the point of contact with the higher states, to which all that is beyond this stage relates.[21]

Above the *ājñā* are two secondary *cakras* called *manas* and *soma*.[22] And in the very pericarp of *sahasrāra* is again a 'lotus' with twelve petals, containing the supreme triangle *kāmakalā*, which is the 'root' (*mūla*) of all the mantras, and which has its lower correspondence (which can be regarded as its reflection in relation to gross manifestation) in the triangle *traipura* of *mūlādhāra*. We cannot think of entering into detail of the very complex descriptions which are given of these different centres of meditation, and which relate for the main part to the *mantra-vidyā*, nor of the enumeration of the different particular *śaktis* which have their levels between *ājñā* and *sahasrāra*.[23] Finally, *sahasrāra* is called *Śivasthāna*, because it is the residence of Paramaśiva, in union with the supreme *nirvāṇa śakti*, the 'Mother of the three worlds'. It is the 'abode of beatitude' where the 'Self' (*ātmā*) is realised. He who really and fully knows *sahasrāra* is liberated from 'transmigration' (*saṁsāra*), for he has broken, by this knowledge itself, all the bonds that held him attached to it, and he has arrived thereafter at the state of *jīvanmukta*.

We shall conclude with a remark, that we believe has never been made anywhere, on the concordance of the centres in question here with the *Sephiroth* of the Kabbala, which indeed,

must necessarily have, as all things, their correspondence in the human being. One could object that the *Sephiroth* number ten, while the six *cakras* and *sahasrāra* only make a total of seven. But this objection falls if one observes that, in the disposition of the 'sephirothic tree' there are three couples placed symmetrically on the 'columns' on right and left, so that all the *Sephiroth* are distributed on seven different levels only. Viewing their projections on the central axis or 'central column', which corresponds to the *suṣumnā* (the two lateral columns being in relation to *iḍā* and *piṅgalā*), one finds oneself, therefore, brought back to the number seven.[24]

Beginning at the top, there is initially no difficulty in what concerns the assimilation of *sahasrāra*, 'localised' at the crown of the head, with the supreme *sephirah*, *kether*, whose very name precisely means the 'crown'. Then comes the composite *hokmah* and *binah*, which must correspond to *ājñā*, and whose duality could even be represented by the two petals of this 'lotus'. Moreover, they have for 'resultant' *daath*, that is 'knowledge', and we have seen that the 'localisation' of *ājñā* refers also to the 'eye of knowledge'.[25] The following couple, that is *hesed* and *geburah*, can, according to a very general symbolism concerning the attributes of 'Mercy' and 'Justice', be placed in man, in relation to the two arms.[26] These two *Sephiroth* will be placed, therefore, at the shoulders, and consequently at the level of the guttural region, corresponding thus to *viśuddha*.[27] As for *Thiphereth*, its central position relates manifestly to the heart, which immediately brings its correspondence to *anāhata*. The couple *netsah* and *hod* will be placed at the hips, points of contact with the lower limbs, as the *hesed* and *geburah* at the shoulders, points of contact with the higher. Now, the hips are at the level of the umbilical region, thus, of *maṇipūra*. Finally, for the last two *Sephiroth*, there seems to be a reason to make an inversion, for *iesod*, by the very significance of its name, is the 'basis', which precisely answers to *mūlādhāra*. One must then assimilate

malkuth to *svādhiṣṭhāna*, which, moreover, the significance of the names seems to justify, for *malkuth* is the 'kingdom', and *svādhiṣṭhāna* literally means 'the proper abode' of the *śakti*.

Despite the length of this account, we have only outlined some of the aspects of a subject that is truly inexhaustible, hoping only to have, thus, brought some useful clarifications for those who would wish to take its study further.

References

1. Published in *Voile d'Isis*, October and November 1937.
2. *The Serpent Power*, third revised edition, Ganesh and Co., Madras. This volume includes the translation of two texts: *Ṣaṭcakra nirūpaṇa* and *Pādukāpañcaka*, preceded by a long and important introduction; our study relates to the contents of the latter.
3. On many points, we cannot do better than to refer back to our own work, *Man and its Becoming According to the Vedanta*. For it is not possible for us to reproduce any more ample explanations in the framework of an article. Consequently, we must assume this work already known.
4. It is regrettable that the author frequently uses, and in particular translates *sṛṣṭi* by the word 'creation', which, as we have often explained, is not suitable from the point of view of Hindu doctrine. We know only too well how many difficulties are raised by the necessity of using Western terminology, as inadequate as may be to express what is at hand. But we think, however, that this word is among those that one may easily enough avoid, and, in fact, we have never ourselves used it. While we are on the question of terminology let us point out also the impropriety of translating *samādhi* as 'ecstasy'. This last word is all the more irksome since it is normally used, in Western language, to designate mystical states, that is, something that is of a wholly different order and with which it is essentially important to avoid all confusion. Moreover, it etymologically means 'to depart from the self' which befits the case of mystical states, while what is designated by the term *samādhi* is, quite to the contrary, a 're-entry' of the being into his proper Self.
5. The word *indriya* at once designates a faculty and its corresponding organism but it is generally preferable to translate it as 'faculty', first because this conforms with its primitive sense, which is 'power', and also because consideration of faculty is here more essential than that of the corporeal *organ*, by reason of the pre-eminence of subtle manifestation in relation to gross manifestation.

6. We do not wholly understand the objection raised by the author against the use of the word 'elements', the traditional term, to designate *bhūtas* in ancient physics. Here is not the place to be preoccupied with the oblivion into which this acceptation has fallen among the moderns, to whom, moreover, every properly 'cosmologic' conception has become equally alien.
7. It is surprising enough that the author has not pointed out the relation between this and the symbolism of the Brāhmaṇic baton (*brahma-daṇḍa*), even more so as he alludes on several occasions to the equivalent symbolism of the caduceus.
8. The author points out very rightly how erroneous are the interpretations ordinarily given by Westerners, who, confusing the two orders of manifestation, wish to reduce everything in question to a purely anatomical and physiological point of view. The Orientalists, ignorant of all traditional sciences, believe that it is only a question here of a more or less whimsical description of certain corporeal organs. The Occultists, for their part, if they admit the distinct existence of the subtle organism, imagine it as a sort of 'double' of the body, subject to the same conditions as the latter, which is hardly more correct and can only end in grossly materialised representations. And regarding this last subject, the author shows in some detail how distant are the Theosophists' conceptions, in particular, from true Hindu doctrine.
9. In the symbol of the caduceus, the central staff corresponds to *suṣumnā*, the two serpents to *iḍā* and *piṅgalā*. The latter are also sometimes represented, on the Brāhmaṇic baton, by the tracing of two helical lines coiling in an inverse direction to each other, so as to cross each other at the level of each of the knots that mark the different centres. In the cosmic correspondences, *iḍā* is related to the Moon, *piṅgalā* to the Sun, and *suṣumnā* to the five principles. It is interesting to note the relation that this presents with the three 'Great Lights' of masonic symbolism.
10. It is still said that *suṣumnā* corresponds by its nature to fire, *vajrā* to the Sun, and *citrā* to the Moon; the interior of the latter, forming the most central channel, is called *brahma-nāḍī*.
11. The seven knots of the Brāhmaṇic baton symbolise the seven 'lotuses'. In the caduceus, conversely, it appears that the end bulb must be related only to *ājñā*, the two accompanying wings then identifying with the two petals of this 'lotus'.
12. The numbers of petals are: 4 for *mūlādhāra*, 6 for *svādhiṣṭhāna*, 10 for *maṇipūra*, 12 for *anāhata*, 16 for *viśuddha*, 2 for *ājñā*, that is a total of 50, which is also the number of letters in the Sanskrit alphabet. All the latters are found in *sahasrāra*, each of them being repeated there 20 times ($50 \times 20 = 1000$).

13. See what we have said about the spiral in *The Symbolism of the Cross*. Let us remember also the figure of the serpent coiled around the 'World Egg' (*brahmāṇḍa*), as also around the *amphalos*, whose equivalent we shall rediscover precisely a little further on.
14. On this point, we will only recall, by way of a particularly striking concordance, the identification established, at the beginning of the Gospel of St. John, between the terms *verbum*, *lux*, and *vita*, specifying that, to be fully understood, it must be related to the world *hiraṇyagarbha*.
15. The triangle, as *yantra* of the *śakti*, is always traced with the base on top and the apex at the bottom. It would be easy to show its similarity with a number of other symbols of the feminine principle.
16. We shall indicate in passing an analogy between these three and a half coils of the *kuṇḍalinī* and the three and half days during which, according to various traditions, the spirit remains still attached to the body after death, and which represent the time necessary to the 'untying' of the vital force, remaining in the 'unawakened' state in the case of the ordinary man. A day is a cyclic revolution corresponding to a coil in the spiral. And, the process of reabsorption always being inverse to the one of manifestation, this uncoiling is considered as summing up in some way the whole life of the individual, which is repeated by retracing the course of events that constituted it. One need hardly add that these misunderstood data have too often produced all sorts of whimsical interpretations.
17. The *maṇḍala* or *yantra* of the element, *pṛthvī* is a square, corresponding as a flat figure to the cube, whose form symbolises the ideas of 'base' and 'stability'. One could say, in the language of Islamic tradition, that one has here a correspondence in the 'black stone', equivalent to the Hindu *liṅga*, and also to the *amphalos* which is, as we have elsewhere shown, one of the symbols of the 'centre of the world'.
18. These three *liṅgas* relate also to the different situations, following the state of the development of being, the *luz* or 'core of immortality', that we spoke of in *The King of the World*.
19. It is important to note that *anāhata*, related to the region of the heart, must be distinguished from the 'lotus of the heart', with eight petals, which is the abode of *puruṣa*: this last is 'situated' in the heart itself, considered as the 'vital centre' of individuality.
20. This command corresponds to the 'celestial mandate' of the Far-Eastern tradition. On the other hand, the denomination of *ājñā-cakra* could be rendered exactly in Arabic by *maqām el-amr*, indicating that here is the direct reflection, in the human being, of the 'world' called *alam el-amr*, just as, from the 'macrocosmic' point of view, this reflection is situated in our state of existence, in the central place of 'earthly paradise'. One could even deduce from this precise considerations on the modality of

'angelic' manifestations in relation to man, but this would be entirely outside of our subject-matter.

21. The vision of the 'third eye', through which the being is liberated from the temporal condition (and which has nothing in common with the 'clairvoyance' of Occultists and Theosophists), is intimately connected to the 'prophetic' function. It is to this that the Sanskrit word *ṛṣi* alludes, which properly signifies 'seer', and which has its exact equivalent in the Hebrew *roeh*, the ancient designation of the prophets, replaced subsequently by the word *nabi* (that is to say 'he who speaks with inspiration'). Let us indicate also, without, however, insisting on it, that what we indicate in this note and the preceding one is in relation to the esoteric interpretation of 'Surat al-Qadr,' concerning the 'descent of the *Qur'an*'.
22. These two *cakras* are represented as 'lotuses' with six and sixteen petals respectively.
23. One of the reasons why the *śakti* is symbolised by a triangle is the triplicity of its manifestation as Wish (*icchā*), Action (*kriyā*), and Knowledge (*jñāna*).
24. One will note the similarity of symbolism of the 'sephirothic tree' and that of the caduceus, following what we have indicated previously. On the other hand, the different 'channels' that connect the *Sephiroth* together are not without analogy with the *nāḍīs* this, of course, in what concerns the particular application that may be made of it to the human being.
25. The duality of *hokmah* and *binah* can, moreover, be placed in a symbolic relationship with the two eyes, right and left, 'microcosmic' correspondence of Sun and Moon.
26. See what we have said in *The King of the World* about the symbolism of the two hands, in relation precisely with the *shekinah* whose relation with the Hindu *śakti* we mention in passing and the 'sephirothic tree'.
27. It is also on the two shoulders that stand, following Islamic tradition, the two angels charged with respectively registering man's good and bad actions, and which represent equally the divine attributes of 'Mercy' and 'Justice'. Let us note also on this subject, that one could 'situate' also in an analogical fashion in the human being the symbolic figure of the 'scales' spoken of in the *Siphra de-Tseniutha*.

4

The Indian Theory of the Five Elements[1]

One knows that, in Hindu doctrine, the 'cosmologic' point of view is principally represented by Vaiśeṣika, and also, under a different aspect, by Sāṁkhya, the latter being able to be characterised as 'synthetic' and the former as 'analytic'. The name Vaiśeṣika is derived from *viśeṣa*, which signifies 'distinctive character', and hence 'individual thing'; it, therefore, properly designates the branch of doctrine that applies to the knowledge of things in a distinct and individual mode. This point of view is the one that corresponds most exactly with the reservation of the differences necessarily brought by the modes of thought respective to the two peoples, to what the Greeks, particularly in the 'presocratic' period, called 'physical philosophy'. We prefer, however, to use the term 'cosmology' to avoid any ambiguity, and to mark better the profound difference that exists between what is in question and modern physics; and, moreover, it is just, thus, that 'cosmology' was understood in the Middle Ages in the West.

Understanding in its subject-matter what relates to sensible or corporeal things, which are of an eminently individual order, the Vaiśeṣika has applied itself to the theory of the elements, which are the constituent principles, of bodies, in more detail than other branches of the doctrine could have done. One must point out,

however, that one is obliged to call upon these latter, and particularly upon the Sāṁkhya, when it is a question of seeking out which are the most universal principles, from which the elements proceed. These elements number according to Hindu doctrine, five; in Sanskrit, they are called *bhūtas*, a word derived from the verbal root *bhū*, which means 'to be', but more exactly in the sense of 'to survive', that is to say something that designates the manifested being viewed in its 'substantial' aspect (the 'essential' aspect being expressed by the root *as*). Thereafter, a certain idea of 'becoming' also attaches itself to this word, since it comes from the side of 'substance' which is the root of all 'becoming' in opposition to the immutability of 'essence'. And it is in this sense that *prakṛti* or the 'universal substance' can be properly designated as 'native', a word which, just like its Greek equivalent *phusis*, above all precisely implies by its etymological derivation, this same idea of 'becoming'. The elements are, therefore, regarded as substantial determinations, or, in other words, as modifications of *prakṛti*, modifications which only have, moreover, a purely accidental character in relation to the latter, since corporeal existence itself, being modality defined by a certain gathering of determined conditions is nothing more than a simple accident in relation to Universal Existence viewed in its wholeness.

If, now, one considers, the being, the 'essences' correlative to the 'substance', these two aspects being complementary to one another and corresponding to that which we call the two poles of universal manifestation, which is the same as saying that they are respective expressions of *puruṣa* and *prakṛti* in this manifestation, it is necessary that these substantial determinations, which are the five elements, should correspond to an equal number of essential determinations, or of 'elementary essences', which are, one might say, the 'archetypes', the ideal or 'formal' principles in the Aristotelian sense of this latter word, and which belong, no longer to the corporeal domain, but to the domain of subtle manifestation.

Sāṁkhya, thus, considers in this way five elementary essences, which have acquired the name *tanmātras*. This term literally signifies a 'measure' or an 'assignation' delimiting the proper domain of a certain quality or 'quiddity' in Universal Existence. It goes without saying that these *tanmātras*, by the very fact that they are of subtle order, are not at all perceptible to the senses, as are the corporeal elements and their combinations. They are only ideally 'conceptible', and they can only receive particular designations by analogy with the different orders of sensible qualities which correspond to them, since it is the quality that is here the contingent expression of essence. In fact, they are habitually designated by the very names of these qualities: auditive or sonorous (*śabda*), tangible (*sparśa*), visible (*rūpa*, with the double meaning of form and colour), palatable (*rasa*), olfactory (*gandha*). But we say that these designations must only be taken as analogical, for these qualities cannot be viewed here except in the principal state and in a certain way, 'non-developed', since it is, as we shall all, only through the *bhūtas* that they will be effectively manifested in the sensible order. The conception of the *tanmātras* is necessary when one wants to relate the notion of elements to the principles of Universal Existence, to which it is, moreover, still connected, but this time from the 'substantial' aspect, by another order of considerations of which we shall speak in the due course. But conversely, this conception clearly does not intervene when one confines oneself to the study of individual existences and sensible qualities as such; and that is why there is no question of this in the Vaiśeṣika, which, even by definition confines itself precisely to this last point of view.

We recall that the five elements admitted by Hindu doctrine are as follows: *ākāśa*, ether; *vāyu*, air; *tejas*, fire; *ap*, water; and *pṛthvīs*, earth. This order is that of this development to their differentiation, starting from ether which is the primordial element. It is always in this order, they are enumerated in all the texts of the Veda where mention is made, notably in the passages of the

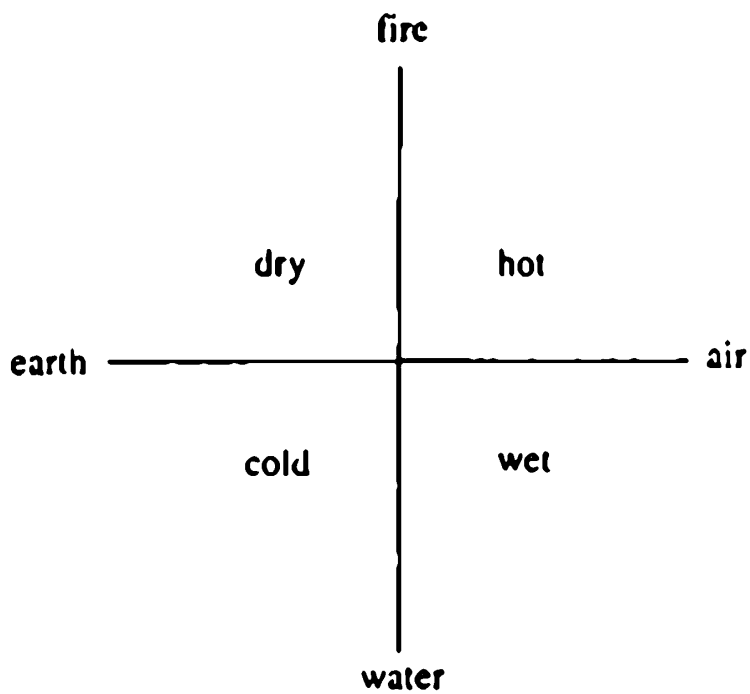
Chāndogya Upaniṣad and the *Taittirīya Upaniṣad* where their genesis is described. And their order of reabsorption, or their return to the undifferentiated state, is naturally inverse to the former. On the other hand, to each element there corresponds a sensible quality that is regarded as its proper quality, the one that manifests its essential nature and by which the latter is known to us. And the correspondence, thus, established between the five elements and the five senses is as follows: to ether, corresponds hearing (*śrotra*); to air, touch (*tvac*); to fire, sight (*cakṣus*); to water, taste (*rasana*); to earth, smell (*ghrāṇa*); the order of development of the senses being also that of the elements with which they are linked and on which they directly depend. And this order conforms, of course, to the one in which we have already enumerated the sensible qualities above, relating them principally to the *tanmātras*. Furthermore, every quality manifested in an element is equally so in the following, no longer as belonging to them exclusively in their own rights, but inasmuch as they proceed from the preceding elements. It would indeed be contradictory to suppose that the very process of development of manifestation, occurring, thus, gradually, might bring, in a further stage, a return to an un-manifested state of what has already been developed in the stages of least differentiation.

Before proceeding further, in what concerns the number of elements and their order of derivation, as well as their correspondence with the sensible qualities, we can note certain important differences with the theories of those Greek 'philosopher physicists' to whom we alluded at the start. First, the majority of the latter have only admitted four elements, not recognising ether as a distinct element; and in this, a strange enough fact, they agree with the Jainas and Buddhists, who are in opposition on this point, as on many others, to orthodox Hindu doctrine. Yet, one must make some exceptions, notably for Empedocles, who admitted the five elements, but developed in the following order: ether, fire, earth, water, and air, which seems difficult to justify.

And again according to some,[2] this philosopher would only have himself admitted four elements, which are then enumerated in a different order: earth, water, air, and fire. This last order is exactly the opposite to the one found in Plato. Thus, it is perhaps necessary to see there, no longer the order of production of the elements, but on the contrary their order of reabsorption into each other. According to various testimonies, the Ophics and the Phythagorians admitted the five elements, which is perfectly normal, given the properly traditional character of their doctrines. Later, moreover, Aristotle admitted them as well, but whatever the case, the role of ether has never been as important nor as clearly defined among the Greeks, at least in their exoteric schools, as among the Hindus. Despite certain texts of the *Phedo* and the Timacus, which are undoubtedly of Pythagorian inspiration, Plato generally envisages only four elements; for him, fire and earth are the extreme elements, air and water are the middle elements, and this order differs from the traditional order of the Hindus in that air and fire are inverted. One may wonder if there is not here a confusion between the order of production, if indeed this really is how Plato himself wished to understand it, and a distribution following what one might call the degrees of subtlety, which we will come back to presently. Plato is in agreement with Hindu doctrine by attributing visibility to fire as its proper quality, but he diverges from it by attributing tangibility to earth instead of attributing it to air. Moreover, it seems difficult enough to find among the Greeks a strictly vigorously established correspondence between the elements and the sensible qualities. And one easily understands why it should be so, for, in considering only four elements, one must immediately notice the lacuna in this correspondence, the number five being, incidentally, everywhere uniformly admitted as regards the senses.

In Aristotle, one finds considerations of a very different character, where it is also a matter of qualities, which, however, are definitely not sensible qualities, properly speaking. These

considerations are based, indeed, on the combinations of hot and cold, which are respectively principles of expansion and condensation, with dry and wet; fire is hot and dry, air is hot and wet, water cold and wet, earth cold and dry. The groupings of these four qualities, which confront each other in two pairs, only concern, therefore, the four ordinary elements, excluding ether, which, moreover, is justified by the remark that either, as primordial element, must contain the groups of opposing or complementary qualities, coexisting, thus, in the neutral state inasmuch as they balance each other there perfectly and previous to their differentiation, which may be regarded as resulting precisely from a rupture in this original equilibrium.



Ether must, therefore, be represented as situated at the point where oppositions do not yet exist, but through the leaving of which they are produced, that is, at the centre of the figure of the cross whose branches correspond to the four other elements. And this representation is effectively the one adopted by the Medieval Hermetics, who expressly admit ether by the name 'quintessence'

(*quinta essentia*), which, moreover, implies an enumeration of the elements in an ascending or 'regressive' order that is inverse of the order of their production, for otherwise ether would be the first element and not the fifth. One can note also that it is really a question of a 'substance' and not an 'essence', and, in this regard, the expression used shows a frequent confusion in medieval Latin terminology, where this distinction between 'essence' and 'substance', in the sense that we have indicated, appears never to have been made very clearly, as one can only too easily realise in scholastic philosophy.[3]

While we are with these comparisons, we must still, on the other hand, warn against a false assimilation to which Chinese doctrine sometimes gives rise, where one finds something that one also ordinarily designates as the 'five elements'. The latter are enumerated, thus; water, wood, fire, earth, metal, this order being considered, in this case also, as the order of production. Something that could mislead is that the number is the same in both cases, and that, out of five terms, three carry equivalent denominations. But to what can the two other ones correspond, and how to make the order indicated her coincide with the order in Hindu doctrine?[4] The truth is that, despite the apparent similarities, it is a question here of a very different point of view, which it would, moreover, be irrelevant to examine here; and to avoid all confusion, it would certainly be better to translate the Chinese term *hing* by something other than 'elements', by *agents* for example, as has been proposed,[5] which is at the same time closer to its real meaning.

Having made these remarks, we must now, if we wish to make precise the notion of elements, first of all set aside, though briefly, several erroneous opinions fairly commonly widespread on this subject in this day and age. In the first place, there is hardly any need to say that, if the elements are the constituent principles of bodies, it is in a very different sense than the one in which the chemists view the constitution of these bodies.

when they consider them as resulting from the combination of certain 'simple elements' or some such. On the one hand, the multiplicity of elements called 'simple' is manifestly opposed to this assimilation, and, on the other, it is not at all proved that these elements really are simple, this name only being given, in fact, to those that the chemists don't know how to further decompose. In any case, other 'elements' are not chemical elements, even simple ones, but clearly substantial principles from which the latter are formed. One must not be deceived by the fact that they are designated by analogy with names which can be at the same time names of certain chemical elements, to which they are in no way identical for all that; each of the latter, whatever it be, proceeds in reality from the group of five elements, although there may be in its nature a certain predominance of one or other element.

One has also wished, more recently, to assimilate the elements to different physical states of matter as understood by modern physicists, that is in short to the different degrees of condensation that occur, emerging from ether: a primordial homogene, which fills all spaces, uniting together all the parts of the corporeal world. From this point of view, one makes the correspondence, going from the most dense to the most subtle, in an order inverse to the one that one admits for their differentiation, between the earth and the solid state, water and the liquid state, air and the gaseous state, and fire and a still more rarefied state, similar enough to what certain physicists have called the 'radiant state', and which must then be distinguished from the state of ether. One again finds there this useless preoccupation, so common in our day and age, to make traditional ideas agree with profane scientific conceptions, which is not, though to say that such a point of view cannot include some degree of truth, in the sense that one can admit that each of these physical states has certain more particular relationships with a definite element. But this is at best only a correspondence, and not an assimilation, which

would besides be incompatible with the constant coexistence of all the elements in a given body, in whatever state it presents itself, and it would be still less legitimate to wish to go further than to claim to identify the elements with the sensible qualities which, from another point of view, are connected to them much more directly. From another side, the order of growing condensation which is, thus, established between the elements is the same as the one we found in Plato: he places fire before air and immediately after ether, as if it were the first differentiating elements at the heart of this original cosmic environment. It is not, therefore, in this way that one can find the justification of the traditional order affirmed by Hindu doctrine. One must, moreover, take the greatest care to avoid holding too exclusively to a systematic point of view, one that is too narrowly limited and particularised. And certainly, any effort to interpret in favour of an identification of these principles with the various physical states in question, under the pretext that it interposes principles of expansion and condensation, would alluredly be badly to misunderstand the theory we have indicated of Aristotle and the Hermetics.

If one absolutely insists on finding a point of comparison with physical theories, in the actual meaning of this word, it would be undoubtedly more correct to consider the elements, referring to their correspondence with the sensible qualities, as representing different vibratory modalities of matter, modalities under which matter is rendered preceptible successively to each of our senses. And, moreover, when we say successively, it must be clearly understood that it is a question here only of a purely logical succession.* But when one speaks, thus, of the vibratory modalities of matter, as well as when it is a question of physical states, there is a point that must be heeded: namely that, among the Hindus at least (and among the Greeks also, to a certain degree), one does not find the notion of matter in the sense used by modern physicists. The proof here is that, as we have already

pointed out, there exists in Sanskrit no word that may, even approximately, be translated as 'matter'. If, therefore, one is allowed to sometimes use this notion of matter to interpret the conception of the ancients, so as to be understood more easily, one must always do so with certain precautions. Still, it is possible to view vibratory states, for example, without making any necessarily appeal to the special properties the moderns attribute essentially to matter. Nonetheless, such an analogical conception seems to us much better able to indicate what that elements are, aided by a way of speaking which enforces a certain imagery, so to speak, than defining their true nature. And perhaps, basically, this is all, it is possible to do in the language presently at our disposal, owing to the oblivion into which traditional ideas have fallen in the Western world.

However, we shall add this too: the sensible qualities express, in relation to our human individuality, the conditions that characterise and determine corporeal existence, in the particular mode of Universal Existence, since it is by these qualities that we know bodies, to the exclusion of every other thing. We can, therefore, see in the elements expression of these same conditions of corporeal existence, no longer from the human, but from the cosmic point of view. It is not possible for us to develop this question as it deserves here. But at least through it can we easily see how the sensible qualities proceed from the elements, that is, as translation or 'microcosmic' reflexion of corresponding 'microcosmic' realities. We can also see how the bodies, being properly defined by the totality of conditions in question should by the same token be constituted as such by the elements in which they are 'substantialised'. And this, it would seem, is at once the most exact and the most general notion one may give of these same elements.

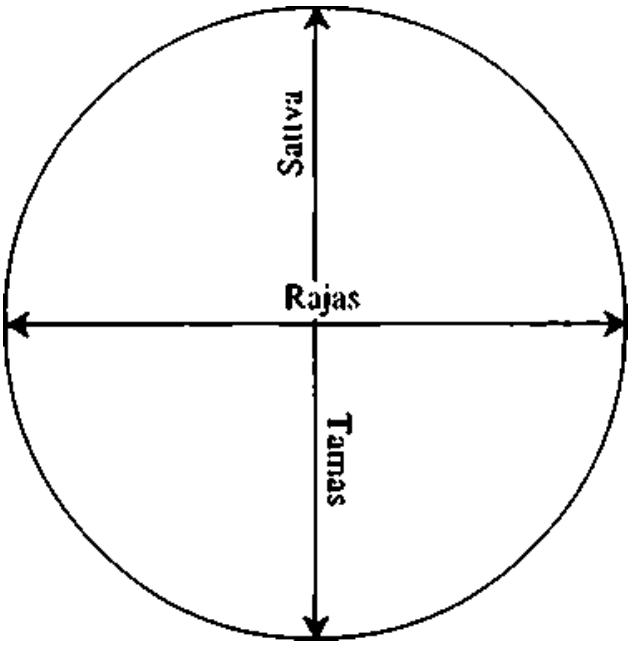
We shall pass, after this, to other considerations which will show better still how the conception of the elements is connected, not only to the conditions of existence of a more universal order,

but more precisely, to the very conditions of all manifestations. One knows what importance Hindu doctrine gives to the consideration of the three *guṇas*: this term designates the qualities, or constituent and primordial attributes, of beings viewed in their different states of manifestation, and which they hold from the 'substantial' principle of their existence, for, from the universal point of view, they are inherent to *prakṛti*, in which they are in perfect equilibrium in the 'indistinction' of pure undifferentiated potentiality. All manifestations or modifications of 'substance' represents a break in this equilibrium. Manifested beings partake, therefore, of the three *guṇas* at various degrees, and these are not states, but general conditions which they are subject in their state, by which they are bound in a way, and which determine the actual tendency of their 'becoming'. We need't fit enter a complete expose, regarding the *guṇas*, but only sufficient to see their application to the distinction of elements. We shall not even repeat the definition of each *guṇa*, already given on several occasions. We shall merely recall for this is what is most important here, that *sattva* is represented as an ascending tendency, *tamas* as a descending tendency, and *rajas*, which is intermediate between the two, as one expansion in the horizontal plane.

The three *guṇas* must be found in each of the elements, as in everything that belongs to the domain of universal manifestation. But they occur therein different proportions, establishing between these elements a sort of hierarchy, which one may regard as analogous to that hierarchy which, from another incomparably more extensive point of view, is established similarly between the multiple states of Universal Existence, even though it is, here, only a question of simple modalities included inside one and the same state. In water and earth, but particularly in earth, it is *tamas* that predominates; physically speaking, this descending and compressive force corresponds to gravity or weight. *Rajas* predominates in air; that is way this element is regarded as endowed essentially with transversal movement. In fire, it is

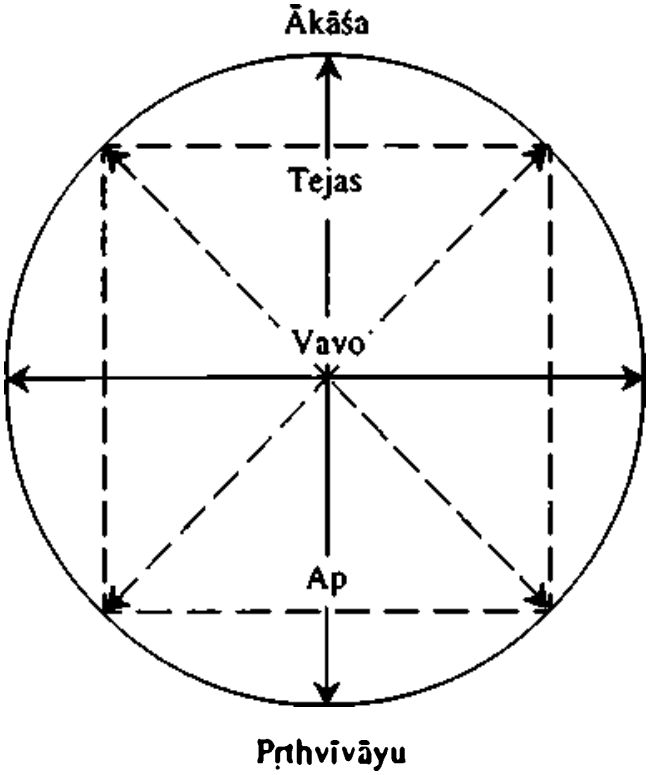
sattva that predominates, for fire is the luminous element: the ascending force is symbolised by the tendency of the flame to rise up, and it is translated physically by the dilating power of heat, inasmuch as this power opposes the condensation of bodies.

To give a more precise interpretation of this, we can imagine the distinction of the elements as operating inside a sphere: in this sphere the two ascending and descending tendencies we have spoken of will operate following the two opposite directions taken on the same vertical axis, in opposite senses to one another, and going respectively to the two poles; as for the expansion in the horizontal sense, that marks an equilibrium between these two tendencies, it will take place naturally in the perpendicular plane in the middle of this vertical axis, that is the plane of the equator. If we consider now the elements as being distributed in this sphere following the tendencies that predominate in them, the earth, by virtue of the descending tendency of gravity, must occupy the lowest point, which is regarded as the region of obscurity, and which is at the same time the bottom of the waters, while the equator marks their surface, following a symbolism which is, moreover, common to all cosmogonic doctrines, to whatever traditional form they belong. Water occupies, therefore, the lower hemisphere, and if the descending tendency is still affirmed in the nature of this element, we cannot say that its action operates there is an exclusive fashion (or almost exclusive, the necessary coexistence of the three *guṇas* in all things preventing the extreme ever being reached effectively in whatever mode of manifestation). For, if we consider a given point of the lower hemisphere other than the pole, the radius corresponding to this point has an oblique direction, intermediate between the descending vertical and the horizontal. We can, therefore, consider the tendency marked by such a direction as breaking down into two others, of which it is the resultant, and which will respectively be the action of *tamas* and of *rajas*. If we relate these two actions to the qualities of water, the vertical aspect, as function of *tamas*,



will correspond to the density, and the horizontal aspect, as function of *rajas*, to fluidity. The equator marks the intermediate region, which is that of air, the neutral element that keeps equilibrium between the two opposing tendencies, as *rajas* between *tamas* and *sattva*, to the point where these two tendencies neutralize each other, and which, spreading transversally on the surface of the water(s), separates and delimits the respective zones of water and fire. Indeed, the higher hemisphere is occupied by fire, in which the action of *sattva* predominates, but where that of *rajas* still operates, for the tendency at every point of this hemisphere, indicated as previously for the lower hemisphere, is intermediate this time between the horizontal and the ascending vertical: the horizontal aspect, as function of *rajas*, will correspond here to heat, and the vertical aspect, as function of *sattva*, to light, inasmuch as heat and light are viewed as two complementary terms that unite in the nature of the igneous element.

In all this, we have not yet spoken of ether: as it is the highest and most subtle of all the elements, we must place it at the highest point, that is at the higher pole, which is the region of pure light, in opposition to the lower pole, which is, as we have



said, the region of darkness. Thus, ether dominates the sphere of the other elements. But, at the same time, one must also consider it as enveloping and penetrating all these elements, whose principle it is, and this by reason of the state of indifferentiation that characterises it, and that allows it to realise a true 'omnipresence' in the corporeal world. As Śaṅkarācārya says in *Ātmabodha*, 'ether is spread everywhere, and it penetrates at once outside and inside things.' We can, therefore, say that among the elements, ether alone reaches the point where the action of *sattva* operates at the highest degree. But we cannot localise it there exclusively, as we did for earth at the opposite point, and we must consider it as occupying at once the totality of the elementary domain, whatever, moreover, the geometric representation to be used to symbolise the entirety of this domain. If we have adopted the representation of a spherical figure, this is not only because it is the one that allows the easiest and cleanest interpretation, but also, and even primarily, because it agrees better than any other figure with the general principles of cosmogonic symbolism.

such as one can find in all traditions. There would be in this regard very interesting comparisons to be made, but we cannot enter here into such developments; which would lead too far from the subject of the present study.

Before leaving this part of our account, we have still one last remark to make: namely, if we take the elements in the order in which we have distributed them in their sphere, going from top to bottom, or from the most subtle to the densest, we find again precisely the order indicated by Plato. But here this order, that we may call hierarchical, is not identical with the order of production of the elements and must be carefully distinguished from it. In effect, air there occupies an intermediate rung between fire and water, and it is nonetheless produced before fire, and to tell the truth, the reason for these two different situations is basically the same: namely, that air is in someway a neutral element, and, thus, by this very fact, corresponds to a state of less differentiation than fire and water, because the two tendencies, ascending and descending, perfectly balance each other again. Conversely, this equilibrium is broken in fire to the advantage of the ascending tendency, and in water to the advantage of the descending tendency. And the manifested opinion between the respective qualities of these two elements clearly marks the state of the greatest differentiation to which they correspond. If one adopts the point of view of the production of the elements, it is necessary to regard their differentiation as operating from the centre of the sphere, a primordial point where we will then place ether inasmuch as it is their principle. From this we will have in the first place the horizontal expansion, corresponding to air, then the manifestation of the ascending tendency, corresponding to fire, and that of the descending tendency, corresponding to water first, and then to earth, the stopping point and final end through all elementary differentiations.

We must now enter into some detail on the properties of each of the five elements. And first, to establish that the first of them,

ākāśa or ether, is a real element, distinct from the others. Indeed, as we have already pointed out above, certain people, notably the Buddhists, do not recognise it as such, and on the pretext that it is *nirūpa*, or 'without form', by virtue of its homogeneity they regard it as a 'non-entity' and identify it with the void, for, to them the homogeneous cannot but be a pure void. The theory of the 'universal void' (*sarva-śūnya*) is presented here, moreover, as a direct and logical consequence of atomism, for, if there are only atoms in the corporeal world that have a positive existence, and if these atoms must move to conglomerate together and, thus, form all bodies, this movement can only happen in a void. However, this consequence is not accepted by the Kannada school, representative of Vaiśeṣika, yet heterodox precisely in that it admits Atomism, such that its 'cosmological' point of view is not, however, consistent with itself. Conversely, the Greek 'philosopher physicists' who do not count ether among the elements, are far from all being Atomists, and they rather appear to overlook it than to expressly reject it. Whatever the case, the opinion of the Buddhists is easily refuted by noting that there cannot be empty space, such a conception being contradictory: in the whole domain of universal manifestation, of which space is part, there can be no void because voidness, which can only be conceived negatively, is not a possibility of manifestation. Besides, this conception of an empty space would be of a container without a content, which is obviously nonsense. Ether is, therefore, that which occupies all spaces, but not for that to be confused with space itself. For space, being only a container, that is in short a condition of existence and not an independent entity, cannot, as such, be the substantial principle of bodies, nor give birth to other elements. Ether is, therefore, not space, but really the content of space viewed prior to all differentiations. In this state of primordial indifferentiation, which is a sort of image of 'indistinction' of *prakṛti* relative to this special domain of manifestation that is the corporeal world, ether already encloses in its

power, not only all the elements, but also all bodies, and its homogeneity itself renders it fit to receive all forms in its modifications. Being the principle of corporeal things, it possesses quality, which is a fundamental attribute common to all bodies. Besides, it is considered as essentially simple, always by virtue of its homogeneity, and as impenetrable, because it itself penetrates everything.

Established in this way, the existence of ether is presented wholly otherwise than as a simple hypothesis, and this shows clearly the profound difference that separates tradition doctrine from all modern scientific theories. However, it is relevant to envisage yet another objection: ether is a real element, but this is not enough to prove that it is a distinct one; in other words, it could be that the element that is spread in all corporeal space (we mean by this the space capable of containing bodies) is none other than air, and then it is the latter that would in reality be the primordial element. The answer to this objection is that each of our senses allows us to know, as its proper object, a quality distinct from the ones made known by the other senses. Now, a quality can only exist in something to which it is related as an attribute is to its subject, and, as each sensible quality is, thus, attributed to an element whose characteristic property it is, it must necessarily be that to the five senses correspond five distinct elements.

The sensible quality that is related to ether is sound. This necessitates some explanation which will be easily understood if one envisages the mode of production of sound by the vibratory movement, which is far from being a recent discovery as certain people believe, for Kannada expressly declares that 'sound is propagated by undulations, wave after wave, or ripple after ripple, radiating in all directions, starting from a determined centre'. Such a movement is propagated around its point of departure by concentric ripples, uniformly distributed in all directions of space. This gives birth to the figure of an undefined and unclosed

spheroid. This is the least differentiated movement of all, by virtue of what we can call its 'isotropism', and that is why it can produce all the other movements, which will be distinguished from it inasmuch as they will no more operate in a uniform fashion in all directions. And similarly, all the more particularised forms will proceed from the original spherical form. Thus, the differentiation of primitively homogeneous ether, a differentiation that engenders the other elements, has its origin in an elementary movement produced in the way we have just described, starting from some initial point, in this undefined cosmic environment. But this elementary movement is nothing but the prototype of a sound wave. The auditory sensation is moreover the only one that makes us directly perceive a vibratory movement. Even if one admits, with the majority of modern physicists, that the other sensations result from a transformation of similar movements, it remains no less true that they are qualitatively different from it as sensations, which here is the only essential consideration. On the other hand, after what has just been said, though it is in ether that the cause of sound resides, it must be clearly understood that this cause must be distinguished from the various environments that can secondarily serve for the propagation of sound, and which contribute to making it perceptible to us by amplifying the elementary etheric vibrations, and this all the more so when these environments are more dense. Let us finally add, on this subject, that the sonorous quality is equally sensible in the four other elements, inasmuch as the latter all proceeds from ether. Besides these considerations, the attribution of the sonorous quality to ether, that is to the first of the elements, has yet another profound reason, that is connected to the doctrine of the primordiality and the perpetuity of sound; but this is a point to which we can here only make a simple allusion in passing.

The second element, the one that is differentiated in the first place starting from ether, is *vāyu* or air. The word *vāyu*, derived from the verbal root *va* which means 'to go' or 'to move', properly

designates breath or wind, and, thence, mobility is considered as the essential character of this element. More precisely, air is, as we have already said, regarded as endowed with transversal movement, movement in which all the directions of space no longer play the same role as in the spheroidal movement that we had to view previously, but which operates conversely following a certain particular direction. It is, therefore, in short, rectilinear movement, which is produced by the determination of this direction. This propagation of movement following certain definite directions implies a rupture in the homogeneity of the cosmic environment; and we have thereafter a complex movement, which, no longer being 'isotropic', must be constituted by a combination or co-ordination of elementary vibratory movements. Such a movement produces equally complex forms, and, as the form is what in the first place effects, touch, the tangible quality can be related to air as belonging properly to it, inasmuch as this element is, by its mobility, the principle of the differentiation of forms. It is, therefore, by the effect of mobility that air is made sensible to us. By analogy, moreover, atmospheric air becomes sensible to touch only by displacement, but, following the remark that we made above in a general way, one must be careful not to identify the element air with this atmospheric air, which is a body, as certain people have not failed to do in establishing certain parallels of this nature. It is, thus, that Kannada declares that air is colourless. And yet it is easy to understand how this must be so, without even referring to the properties of atmospheric air. For colour is a quality of fire, and fire is logically later than air in the order of the development of the elements; this quality is still not, therefore, manifested at the stage represented by air.

The third element is *tejas* or fire, which is manifested to our senses in two principal aspects, as light and as heat. The quality that belongs to it by its own right is visibility, and, in this regard, it is in its luminous aspect that fire must be viewed. This is too clear to need further explanation, for it is obviously through light

alone that bodies are made visible. According to Kannada. 'Light is coloured, and it is the principle of the coloration of bodies.' Colour is, therefore, a characteristic propriety of right: in light itself, it is white and resplendent; in the various bodies it is variable, and one may distinguish among its modifications simple colours and mixed or blended colours. Let us note that the Pythagoreans, as reported by Plutarch, affirmed equally that 'colours are nothing but a reflection of light, modified in different ways'. One would be greatly mistaken, therefore, to see here yet another discovery of modern science. On the other hand, in its caloric aspect, fire is sensible to touch, in which it produces the impression of temperature; air is neutral in this relation, since it is earlier than fire and heat is an aspect of the latter; and, as for cold, it is regarded as a characteristic property of water. Thus, with regard to temperature as well as in what concerns the action of the two ascending and descending tendencies that we defined previously, fire and water oppose each other, while air is found in a state of equilibrium between these two elements. Moreover, if one considers that cold increases the density of bodies by contracting them, while heat dilates and makes them subtle, one will perceive without difficulty that the correlation of heat and cold with fire and water respectively is included, as a particular application and simple consequence, in the general theory of the three *guṇas* and their distribution in the entirety of the elementary domain.

The fourth element, *ap* or water, has as characteristic properties, besides the cold that we just spoke of, density or gravity, which is common to it and earth, and fluidity or viscosity, which is the quality which distinguishes it essentially from all the other elements. We have already pointed out the correlation of these two properties with the respective actions of *tamas* and *rajas*. On the other hand, the sensible quality that corresponds to water is taste; and one can incidentally remark, although there is no place have to attach too great an importance to considerations of this

sort, that this is found to agree with the opinion of modern physiologists who think that a body is only 'palatable' to the degree that if dissolves in saliva, in other worlds, taste, in anybody, is a consequence of fluidity.

Finally, the fifth and last element is *pṛthvī* or earth, which no longer possessing fluidity as does water, corresponds to the most condensed corporeal modality of all. That is why it is in this element that we find gravity, in its highest degree which is manifested in the descent or fall of bodies. The sensible quality that belongs to earth is smell; that is why this quality is regarded as residing in solid particles which, detaching themselves from bodies, enter into contact with the organ of smell. On this point still, there seems to be no disagreement with actual physiological theories; but, moreover, even if there were to be any disagreement, it would basically matter little, for the error must then be found, in any case, with profane science, and not with traditional doctrine.

To end, we will say a few words on the way in which Hindu doctrine views the organs of the senses in their relation to the elements. Since each sensible quality proceeds from an element in which it essentially resides, the organ by which this quality is perceived must conform to it, that is, must itself be of the nature of the corresponding element. It is, thus, that the true organs of the senses are constituted, and, one must distinguish them, conversely to the opinion held by Buddhists, from external organs, that is, from parts of the human body which are only their seats and their instruments. Thus, the true organ of hearing is not the auricle of the ear, but the portion of ether that is contained in the inner ear, and that goes into vibration under the influence of a sound wave; and Kannada observes that it is not at all the first wave, nor the intermediate waves that make us hear the sound, but the last wave that comes into contact with the organ of hearing. Similarly, the true organ of vision is not the ball of the eye, nor the pupil, not the retina, but a luminous principle that resides in the eye, and that enters into communication with the

light emanated by external objects or reflected by them. The luminosity of the eye is not ordinarily visible, but it can become so in certain circumstances, particularly among animals that see in the dark of the night. It must be noted besides that the luminous ray by which the visual perception operates, and which extends between the eye and the perceived object, can be considered in two ways, on the one hand, as going from the eye to reach the object, and on the other, reciprocally, as coming from the object to the pupil of the eye. One finds a similar theory of vision among the Pythagorians, and this agrees equally with the definition which Aristotle gives of sensation, conceived as, 'the common act of the perceiver and the perceived.' One may indulge in considerations of the same nature for the organs of each of the other senses; but we think, through these examples, to have given ample indications in this regard.

Such is, exposed in its broad outlines and interpreted as exactly as possible, the Hindu theory of the elements, which, besides the intrinsic interest it presents in itself, is capable of giving an understanding, in a more general way, of what the 'cosmologic' point of view is in traditional doctrines.

References

1. Published in *Voile d'Isis*, August-September 1935.
2. Struve, *De elementis Empedoclis*.
3. In the diagram placed at the head of the treatise *De arte combinatoria* of Leibnitz, and which reflects the conception of the Hermetics, 'quintessence' is represented at the centre of the cross of the elements or, if one prefers, the double cross of the elements and qualities, by a rose with five petals, thus, forming the Rosicrucian symbol. The expression *quinta essentia* can also be related to the 'quintuple nature of ether', which must be understood, not as 'five different ethers', as certain modern people have imagined (which is in contradiction with the undifferentiation of the primordial element), but as ether viewed in itself and as principle of the four other elements. This is, moreover, the alchemical interpretation of this rose with five petals we just spoke of.

4. These 'five elements' are also disposed following the figure of a cross formed by the double opposition of water and fire, wood and metal, but the centre is here occupied by earth.
5. Marcel Granet, *Chinese Thought*, p. 313.
6. It goes without saying that one cannot hope in the least to realise, in supposing a chronological succession in the exercise of the different senses, a conception in the genre of the ideal statue which Condillac imagined in his too famous *Treatise on the Sensations*.

5

Dharma[1]

THE word *dharma* seems to be one of the Sanskrit terms that most embarrasses translators, and not without reason, for, in fact, it resents/offers multiple meanings, and it certainly is impossible always to render it uniformly by the same word in another language; perhaps it might often even be better to preserve it purely and simply, on condition of explaining it through a commentary. Mr. Gualtherus H. Mees, who has devoted a recently published book[2] to this subject, and who, although restricting himself almost exclusively to the social point of view, displays more understanding than one encounters for the most part among Occidentals, very correctly notes, if there is a certain indetermination about this term, it is not at all synonymous with vagueness, for it in no way proves that the conception of the Ancients lacked clarity, nor that they did not know how to distinguish the different aspects of what was in question. This alleged vagueness, of which one could find many examples, rather indicates that the thought of the Ancients was much less narrowly limited than that of the moderns, and that, instead of being analytic like the latter, it was essentially synthetic. Moreover, there still survives something of this indetermination in a term such as 'law', for example, which also embraces meanings very different from each other. And this word 'law' is precisely with that of 'order', one of those which,

in many cases, can least imperfectly render the idea of dharma.

We know that *dharma* is derived from the root *dhri*, which means 'to carry,' 'to support,' 'to sustain,' 'to maintain.'[1] It is properly a question, therefore, of a principle of a conservation of beings, and consequently of stability, in at least as much as stability is compatible with the conditions of manifestation, for all applications of dharma relate always to the manifested world. That is why it is not possible to admit, as the author seems predisposed to do, that this term can be more or less a substitute for *ātmā*, with this single difference that it would be 'dynamic' instead of 'static'. *Ātmā* is non-manifested, therefore, immutable; and dharma is one of its expressions, if one wishes, in the sense that it reflects the principal immutability in the order of manifestation; it is 'dynamic' only in the measure that manifestation necessarily implies 'becoming', but it is that which renders this 'becoming' other than pure change, that which always maintains throughout change itself, a certain relative stability. It is, moreover, important to note, in this regard, that the root *dhri* is almost identical, in form and meaning, with another root *dhru*, from which is derived the word *dhruva* which designates 'pole'. Effectively, it is to this idea of 'pole' or 'axis' of the manifested world that one ought to refer if one really wishes to understand the notion of dharma: it is what remains invariable at the centre of the revolutions of all things, and what regulates the course of change by the very fact that it does not participate in it. We must not forget that, by the synthetic character of the thought it expresses, language is here much more closely bound to symbolism than in modern languages, and that, moreover, it is from symbolism that it holds this multiplicity of meanings of which we spoke earlier. And perhaps one could even show that the conception of dharma is connected quite directly to the symbolic representation of the 'axis' through the figure of the 'Tree of the World.'

On the other hand, Mr. Mees correctly points out the kinship of the notions of dharma and *ṛta*, which etymologically has the

meaning 'rectitude' (in the same way as the *te* of the Far-Eastern tradition, which is also very close to dharma), which again obviously recalls the idea of 'axis', which is that of a constant and invariable direction. At the same time, this term *rta* is identical with the word 'rite', and one could indeed say that the latter, originally at least, designates all that is accomplished in conformity with order; it only comes to assume a more limited meaning as a consequence of the degeneration which gives birth to a 'profane' activity, in whatever domain it be. It must be clearly understood that rite always preserves the same character, and that it is non-ritual activity that is in someway deviant. All that is only 'convention' or 'custom', lacking any profound reason, did not exist at the beginning and at the origin of things; and rite, traditionally viewed, has no relation, to all this, which can only ever be its counterfeit or parody. But there is yet something else: when we speak here of conformity with order, one must not only understand by this human order, but also, and even primarily, cosmic order; in every traditional conception, indeed, there is always a strict correspondence between the two, and it is precisely rite that maintains their relations in a conscious fashion, implying in someway a collaboration of man, in the sphere where his activity is exercised, with the cosmic order itself.

Similarly, the notion of dharma is not restricted to man, but extends to all beings and to all their states of manifestation. That is why a uniquely social conception would not suffice to permit its understanding at depth. This is nothing more than a particular application, which should never be separated from 'law', or the primordial and universal 'norm' of which it is but a translation in specifically human mode. Doubtless, one clearly can speak of the dharma proper to each being (*svadharma*) or proper to each group of beings, such as a human community for example; but this is only, truth to tell, a particularisation of dharma in relation to the special conditions of this being or this group, whose nature and constitution are necessarily analogous to those of the whole it is

part of, whether this whole be a certain state of existence or even the whole manifestation, for the analogy is always applied to all levels and all degrees. We see that we are, here, a long way from a 'moral' conception: if an idea such as 'justice' sometimes proves convenient for rendering the sense of dharma, it is only in so far as it is a human expression of equilibrium or harmony, that is to say, of one of the aspects of the maintenance of cosmic stability. With even stronger reason, an idea of 'virtue' can apply here only in the measure that it indicates that the actions of a being are in conformity with its own nature, and by this very fact, with the total order that has its reflection or image in the nature of each. Similarly again, if one considers a human community and no longer an isolated individuality, the idea of 'legislation' is incorporated into that of dharma only because such legislation must normally be an adaptation of cosmic order to the social environment; and this character is particularly visible in that which concerns the institution of the castes, as we shall see in a following article. Thus, are explained in short all the secondary meanings of the word *dharma*. There is a difficulty only when one wishes to consider them separately and without seeing how they are derived from a common principle, which is, one could say, a sort of fundamental unity to which their multiplicity is reduced.[4]

Before concluding this survey, we must still, to situate the notion of dharma more exactly, indicate the place it occupies among the goals that traditional Hindu scriptures assign to human life. These goals are four in number and are enumerated thus, in a hierarchically ascending order: *artha, kāma, dharma, mokṣa*; this last, that is to say 'Deliverance', is the single supreme goal, and, being beyond the domain of manifestation, is of a quite different order to the other three, and without common measure with them, as the absolute is without common measure with the relative. As for the first three goals, which all relates to the manifest; *artha* comprises the entirety of benefits of the corporal order; *kāma* is desire, whose satisfaction constitutes well-being of

the psychic order; dharma being superior to *kāma*, must be considered as having a realisation arising properly from the spiritual order, that which accords in effect with the universal character we have recognised in it. It naturally follows however that all these goals including dharma itself, being always contingent, like the manifestation outside of which they could not be envisaged, can only ever be subordinate in relation to the supreme goal, *vis-à-vis* which they are nothing more, in short, than simple means. Each of these same goals is, moreover, subordinate also to those that are higher than it, while still remaining relative. But, when they alone are enumerated, to the exclusion of *mokṣa*, it is, then, a question of a point of view limited to a consideration of the manifest, and it is only, thus, that dharma can sometimes appear as the highest goal proposed for man. Besides, we shall in due course see that these goals more particularly correspond respectively to the different *varṇas*.[5] And we can now say that this correspondence resides essentially in the theory of the three *guṇas*, which shows clearly that, here again, the human order appears as indissolubly entwined with the whole cosmic order, in its entirety.

References

1. Published in *Voile d'Isis*, October 1935.
2. *Dharma and Society*, N.V. Service, The Hague; Luzac and Co., London. The greatest part of the book concerns more especially the question of *varṇas* or castes, but this point of view itself deserves to be made the subject for another article.
3. Whatever the another says about this, a kinship of root with the word 'form' seems hardly likely, and in any case, we do not see clearly what consequences can be drawn from it.
4. It is easy to understand also that the social application of dharma is always translated, if one wants to use modern language, as 'duty', and not as 'right'; the dharma proper to a being can only evidently be expressed by what he himself must do, and not by what others must do in his regard, which rises naturally from the dharma of these other beings.
5. cf. the following chapter.

6

Varṇa[1]

Mr Gualtherus H. Mees, in his book *Dharma and Society* of which we have already spoken, expatiates particularly, as we have said, on the question of the castes. Moreover, he does not accept this word in the way we understand it, but prefers to keep the Sanskrit term *varṇa* without translating it, or to render it by an expression like 'natural classes', which, indeed, defines fairly well what is in question, since it is really a hierarchical distribution of human beings in conformity with the nature proper to each of them. However, it is to be feared that the word 'classes', even accompanied by a qualifier, might evoke the idea of something more or less comparable to the social classes of the West, which are, in reality, purely artificial, and have nothing in common with a traditional hierarchy, of which they represent at best a short of parody or caricature. That is why we find, for our part, that it is still better to use the word 'castes', which assuredly merely has a quite conventional value, but which at least was coined expressly to designate the Hindu organisation. Yet Mr. Mees reserves it for the multiple castes that, in fact, exist in India now, and which he wants to see as something completely different from primitive *varṇas*. We cannot share this way of viewing things, for these are in reality only secondary subdivisions, due to a greater complexity or differentiation of the

social organisation, and whatever their multiplicity, they nonetheless always fit into the framework of the four *varṇas*, which alone constitute the fundamental hierarchy and remain necessarily invariable, as expression of traditional principles and reflection of cosmic order in the human social order.

There is, beneath this distinction that Mr. Mees wishes to make between *varṇa* and 'caste', an idea that seems to us inspired for the great part by Bergsonian theories of 'open societies' and 'closed societies', although he never refers expressly to these. He tries to distinguish two aspects of dharma, of which one corresponds more or less to *varṇa* and the other to 'caste', and which would alternatively affirm their predominance in what he terms 'periods of life' and 'periods of form', to which he attributes respectively the characteristics 'dynamic' and 'static'. We do not at all intend to discuss here these philosophico-historic conceptions, which obviously rest on no traditional datum. It is more interesting for us to draw forth a misunderstanding about the word *jāti* that the author believes designates what he calls 'caste', while, in reality, it is quite simply employed at as an equivalent or synonym for *varṇa*. This word *jāti* literally means 'birth', but one must not understand it, or at least not exclusively, nor on principle, in the sense of 'heredity'; it designates the individual nature of the being, inasmuch as it is necessarily determined from birth itself, as a gathering of possibilities that the will develop in the course of his existence. This nature results primarily from what the being is in itself, and secondarily only from the influences of environment, of which heredity, properly understood, is but a part. It must further be added that this environment itself is normally determined by a certain law of 'affinity', so as to be as consonant as possible with the tendencies proper to the being which is born there. We say 'normally' for there could be more or less numerous exceptions, at least in a period of confusion like the Kaliyuga. This being so, one cannot see at all what an 'open' caste would be if one understands by

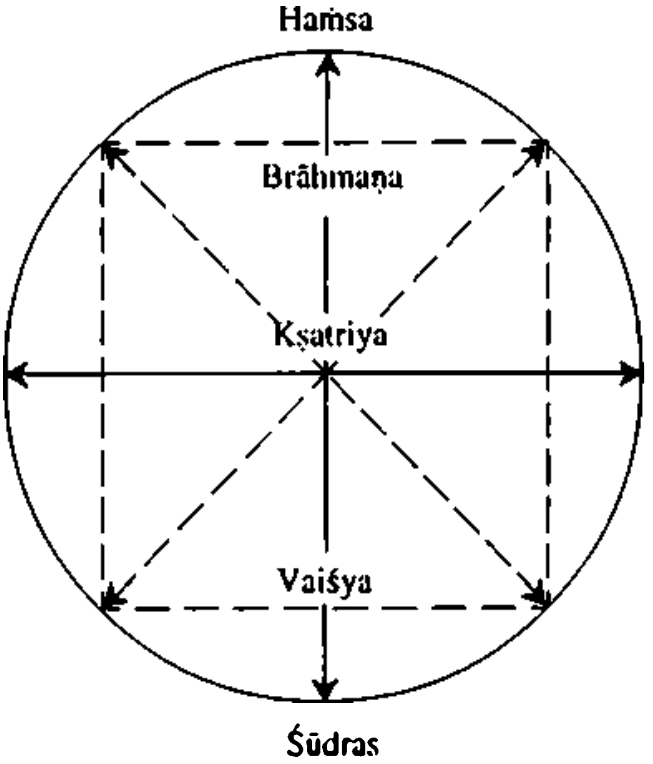
this (and how else could one understand it?) that an individual would have the possibility of changing castes at a given moment; this would imply in him a change of nature which is quite as inconceivable as a sudden change of species in the life of an animal or vegetable (and one might remark that the word *jāti* also has the sense of 'species', which still more completely signifies this comparison). An apparent change of caste cannot be anything more than the correction of an error, in the case where one would first attribute to an individual a caste that was not really his; but the fact that such an error can sometimes happen (and precisely again as a result of the obscuration of the Kaliyuga) does not at all prevent, in a certain general fashion, the possibility of determining true caste from birth. If Mr. Mees seems to believe that only considerations of heredity intervene then, it is because he doubtless ignored the fact that the means of this determination can be furnished by certain traditional sciences, even if only by astrology (which, properly understood, is here something wholly different to the alleged 'scientific astrology' of certain modern Occidentals, and has nothing to do with a 'conjectural' or 'divining' art, any more than with the empiricism of statistics and the calculation of probabilities).

Having settled this, let us return to the notion of *varṇa* itself: this word properly signifies 'colour', but also, by extension, 'quality' in general, and, that is, why it can be taken to designate individual nature. Mr. Mees very rightly dismisses the strange interpretation proposed by certain people, who wish to see in the meaning of 'colour' proof that the distinction of the *varṇas* would have been, originally, based upon difference of race, the least confirmation of which it is totally impossible to find anywhere. The truth is that, if colours are effectively attributed to the *varṇas*, it is in a purely symbolic way; and the 'key' to this symbolism is given by the correspondence with the *guṇas*, a correspondence that is notably indicated most explicitly in this text of the *Viṣṇu-purāṇa*: 'When Brahmā, conformity with his purpose, wished to

create the world, beings in whom *sattva* prevailed (issued from) his mouth; others in whom *rajas* was predominant issued from his chest; yet others in whom *rajas* and *tamas* were both strong issued from his thighs; finally, others issued from his feet, having *tamas* for principal characteristic. From these beings were composed the four *varṇas*, the Brāhmaṇas, the Kṣtriyas, the Vaiśyas, and the Śūdras who respectively issued from his mouth, chest, thighs, and feet'. *Sattva* being represented by the colour white, the latter is naturally attributed to the Brāhmaṇas; similarly, red, representative colour of *rajas*, is attributed to the Kṣatriyas; the Vaiśyas, characterised by a mixture of the two lesser *guṇas*, have as symbolic colour yellow; finally, black, colour of *tamas*, is consequently the one that befits the Śūdras.

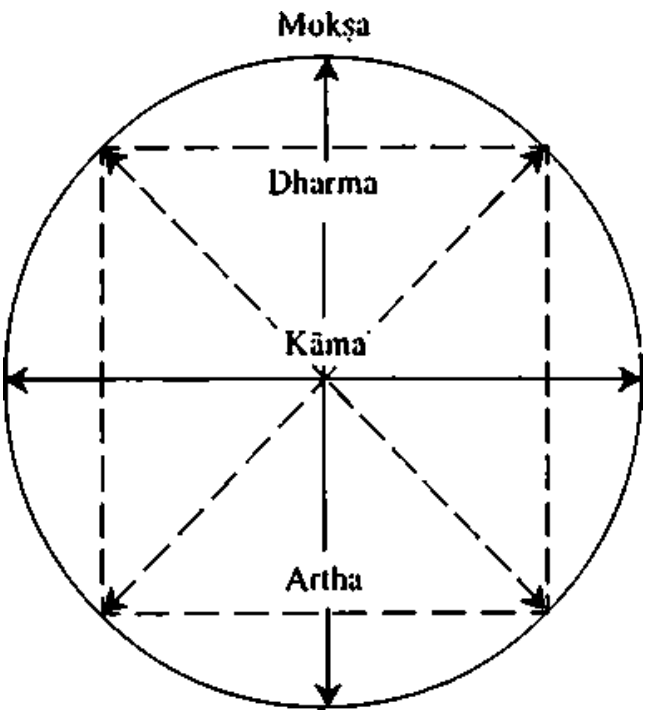
The hierarchisation of the *varṇas*, thus, determined by the *guṇas* that respectively predominate in them, is exactly superimposed on that of the elements, quite as we have shown in our study on this subject.[2] This is what is immediately shown by the comparison of the diagram below with the one that we gave then. One must only note, so that the similarity be complete, that the place of ether must be occupied hereby *haṁsa*, that is to say, by the single primordial caste that existed in the Kṛtayuga, and which contained the four later *varṇas* in principle and in the undifferentiated state, in the same way that ether contains the other four elements.

On the other hand, Mr. Mees attempts, whilst, moreover, defending himself from the wish to push these analogies too far, nonetheless to indicate a correspondence between the four *varṇas* and the four *āśramas* or regular stages of existence (which we shall not examine here), and also the four goals of human life that we spoke of previously in respect of dharma. But, in this last case, the very fact that it is always a question of quaternary division had led him to a manifest inaccuracy. Indeed, it is obviously inadmissible that one should propose as a goal, even if it be the lowliest of all, the obtaining of something that would



purely and simply correspond to *tamas*. The distribution, if one completes it from bottom to top, must, therefore, start in reality on the step that is immediately above the latter, as our second diagram shows. It is easy to understand that dharma corresponds quite effectively to *sattva*, *kāma* to *rajas*, and *artha* to a mixture of *rajas* and *tamas*. At the same time, the relations of these goals with the character and role of the three higher *varṇas* (that is those whose members possess the qualities of *āryа* and *dvija*) emerge then of themselves: the function of the Vaiśya relates clearly to the acquisition of *artha* or the benefits of corporal order; *kāma* or desire is the motive of the activity that properly befits the Kṣatriya; and the Brāhmaṇa is truly the representative and the natural guardian of dharma.

As for *mokṣa*, this supreme goal is, as we have already said, of an entirely different order from the three goals and without any common measure with them; it is situated, therefore, beyond all that corresponds to the particular functions of the *varṇas*, and it cannot be contained, as are transitory and contingent goals, in the sphere that represents the domain of conditioned existence.



since it is precisely liberation from this existence itself. It is also, of course, beyond the three *guṇas*, which only concern the states of universal manifestation.

These few considerations show clearly enough that when it is a question of traditional institutions, a uniquely 'sociological' point of view proves insufficient to get to the depths of things, since the true foundation of these institutions is really of a 'cosmological' order. But it goes without saying that certain lacunae in this regard need, however, in noway prevent us from recognising the merit of Mr. Mees' work, morett which is certainly much superior to the majority of works that other Occidentals have devoted to these same questions.

References

1. Published in *Voile d'Isis*, November 1935.
2. See the chapter *The Hindu Theory of the Five Elements*, p. 45 in original.

7

Tantrism and Magic[1]

One is accustomed, in the West, to attribute to Tantrism a 'magical' character, or at least to believe that magic plays a predominant role in it. There is here an error in interpreting what concerns Tantrism, and perhaps also what concerns magic, about which our contemporaries have only, in general, extremely vague and confused ideas as we have shown in one of our recent articles. We shall not at present return to this last point; but, taking magic strictly in its proper sense, and supposing that it is really, thus, that one understands it, we shall only ask what, in Tantrism itself, could give occasion for this false interpretation, for it is always more interesting to explain an error than to confine oneself purely and simply to its statement.

First of all, we shall recall that magic, no matter how inferior an order it belongs to itself, is nevertheless an authentic traditional science. As such, it can legitimately have a place among the applications of an orthodox doctrine, so long as it is only a subordinate and very secondary place which befits its essentially contingent character. On the other hand, given that the effective development of particular traditional sciences is, in fact, determined by conditions proper to such and such an epoch, it is natural and in some sense normal that the most contingent of them develop mainly in the period when humanity is the furthest from pure intellectuality, that is, in the Kaliyuga, and that they,

thus, assume, while remaining within the limits assigned to them by their own nature, an importance that they never could have had in earlier periods. The traditional sciences, whatever they be, can always serve as 'supports' to rise to knowledge of a higher order, and it is this which, more than what they are in themselves, gives them a proper doctrinal value. But, as we say on the other hand, such 'supports' must generally become more and more contingent as the cyclic 'descent' is accomplished, so as to remain adapted to the human possibilities of every epoch. The development of the inferior traditional sciences is, therefore, in short, only a particular case of this necessary 'materialisation' of the 'supports' we have spoken of, whilst, at the same time, it naturally follows that the dangers of deviation become all the greater as one goes further in this direction. And that is why a science like magic is manifestly among those that gives way most easily to all sorts of deformations and illegitimate usages. Deviation, in all cases, is moreover only imputable, definitively, to conditions intrinsic to this period of 'obscuration', which is the Kaliyuga.

It is easy to understand the direct relation that all these considerations have with Tantrism, a doctrinal form specially adapted to the Kaliyuga. And if one adds, as we have anyway indicated, that Tantrism most especially insists on 'power' as a means and even as a possible base for 'realisation', one cannot be surprised that it must give by this very fact a fairly considerable importance, even, one might say, the maximum importance compatible with their relativity, to the sciences that are capable, in one way or another, of contributing to the development of this 'power' in a given domain. Magic obviously being in this situation, there is no dispute that it finds a place here. But it must be clearly said, that it cannot in anyway constitute the essential in Tantrism. To cultivate magic for itself, even besides to bring as one's goal the study of the production of 'phenomena' of whatever type, is to imprison oneself within illusion instead of striving to be free of it. This is only deviation and consequently,

it is no longer Tantrism, an aspect of an orthodox tradition and a 'path' destined to lead the being to true 'realisation.'

One generally freely admits that there is a Tāntric initiation, but most often without taking into account what is really implied by this. All that we have exposed again and again, on the subject of spiritual ends being without exception the same for every orthodox initiation, exempts us from labouring this point. Magic as such, referring exclusively to the 'psychic' domain by very definition, certainly has nothing initiatory about it, therefore, even if it happens that an initiatory ritual brings into play certain apparently 'magic' elements, it necessarily, by the goal it assigns to them and by the way it uses them in conformity with this goal, 'transforms' them into something of a wholly different order, in which the 'psychic' will no longer be but a single 'support' of the spiritual. And, thus, it will no longer really be a question of magic, any more than, for example, it is a question of geometry when one ritually makes the diagram of a *yantra*. The 'support' taken in its 'materiality', if one can express it, thus, must never be confused with the character of superior order which is essentially conferred on it by its destination. This confusion can only be the act of superficial observing, incapable of seeing anything whatever beyond the most external formal appearances, which is indeed the case of almost all who, in the modern West, have wished to occupy themselves with these matters, having always brought with them all the incomprehension inherent to the profane mentality. It is, moreover, this very confusion which, we remark in passing, is equally the point of departure of those 'naturalist' interpretations which they presume to give all traditional symbolism.

To these several observations, we will add yet another of a somewhat different character. One knows the importance of those Tāntric elements that have penetrated certain forms of Buddhism, those that are included in the general designation of Mahāyāna. But, far from being only a 'corrupted' Buddhism, as it seems

fashionable to say in the West, these forms on the contrary represent the result of an entirely traditional adaptation of Buddhism. That one can no longer, in certain cases, easily rediscover the proper character of original Buddhism, is of little importance, or rather, merely testifies to the extent of the transformation that has thus operated.[2] One can then ask this question: how can such a thing have really been the doing of Tantrism, if the latter was really nothing more nor less than magic? There is here an impossibility perfectly evident to anyone with the least knowledge of traditional realities. It is, moreover, at depth, the very impossibility that the inferior should produce the superior, or that a 'plus' should come from a 'minus'. But is not this absurdity precisely the one found implied in all 'evolutionist' thought of modern Westerners, and which through this contributes, in large measure, to falsify irremediably all their conceptions?

References

1. Published in *E.T.*, August-September, 1957.
2. This passage is made to agree with the modification that René Guénon himself brought to the question of Buddhism in the fourth edition of *Introduction to the Study of Hindu Doctrines* (1952).

8

The Fifth Veda[1]

Among the specifically modern mistakes that we have frequently had occasion to denounce, one that is most directly opposed to every true understanding of traditional doctrines is what we may term 'historicism' which, moreover, is basically nothing but a simple consequence of the 'evolutionist' mentality. It consists, in effect, of supposing that all things must have originated in the most rudimentary and crude fashion, to subsequently undergo a progressive elaboration, such that this or that conception would appear at a determined moment, the later (appearance) being judged the most elevated (or accomplished), thus, implying that they could only be 'the products of a civilisation already advanced'. This mode of expression has become so current it is sometimes repeated almost mechanically by the very people who attempt to react against such a mentality, but who have merely 'traditionalist' intentions without any true traditional knowledge. To this way of seeing things, it is necessary to oppose the view that, on the contrary, it is at the beginning that all which appears in the spiritual and intellectual domains is found in a state of perfection, from which it has only afterwards fallen away through that 'obscuration' that necessarily accompanies every cyclic process of manifestation. This fundamental law, which we must be content to recall here without entering into further development, is obviously enough to reduce to nothing

all the results of the alleged 'historical critique'. One can further remark that the latter implies a fixed bias, denying every supra-human element, and which treats traditional doctrines themselves as purely human 'thought', totally comparable in this regard to what counts as philosophy and the profane sciences. To this point of view again, no compromise is possible, and it is, moreover, in reality this profane 'thought' itself which is of very recent date, and was only able to appear as the 'product of an already advanced degeneration', we might say, reversing in an 'anti-evolutionist' way the phrase we cited a moment ago.

If we apply these general considerations to the Hindu tradition, we shall say that, contrary to the Orientalists' opinion, that nothing at all of the sort called 'Vedism', 'Brāhmaṇism', and 'Hinduism', ever existed, if we understand by these doctrines that saw the light of day in successive epochs, replacing each other; and where each is characterised by conceptions essentially different, if not contradictory, from those of the others, conceptions that would have been formed 'successively' after a reflection imagined on the model of simple philosophical speculation. These diverse denominations, should one hold to their preserving, must only be regarded as designating one and the same tradition, to which they may all in effect relates.

At best, one may say that each relates more directly to a certain aspect of this tradition, the different aspects clinging closely together, being unable in any real way to be isolated from each other. This immediately results from the fact that the tradition in question is, in principle, contained integrally in the Veda, and that, consequently, all that is contrary to the Veda or is not legitimately derived from it is by this very fact excluded from this tradition, under whatever aspect one views it. The essential unity and invariability of the doctrine are, thus, assured, whatever developments and adaptations it may produce to respond in special ways to the needs and aptitudes of men of this or that epoch.

It must be clearly understood, indeed that the immutability of the doctrine itself is not obstacle to any development, nor to any

adaptation, with the only condition that they always be in strict conformity with principles; but also, at the same time, that nothing of all this ever constitutes 'novelties'. Since it would in any case never be a question of anything but an 'explication' of what the doctrine already implied through all times, or of another formulation of the same truths in different terms, to render them more easily accessible to the mentality of a more 'obscured' epoch. What could first of all be grasped, immediately and without difficulty, in the principle itself, men of later epochs could no longer see, apart from exceptional cases, and one had to then compensate for this general lack of understanding by detailed explanations and commentaries which hitherto were not at all necessary. Furthermore, the aptitudes to arrive directly at pure knowledge becoming ever more rare, one had to open other 'haths', putting to work more and more contingent means, following in a degree, and remedying in whatever measure possible the 'descent' which would make itself effected from time to time in the course of the cycle of terrestrial humanity. Thus, one might say, the latter received, to attain its transcendent ends, facilities that were the greater, the lower its spiritual and intellectual levels sank, in order to save all who might be saved, in taking into account those conditions inevitably determined by the law of the cycle.

It is through these considerations that one may really understand the place occupied, in Hindu tradition, by what is habitually designated by the name 'Tantrism', in that it represents the body of teachings and means of 'realisation', more especially appropriate to the conditions of the Kaliyuga. It would, therefore, be completely erroneous to see here a separate doctrine, still less any 'system', as Westerners are always too ready to do. To tell the truth, it is more a question of a 'spirit', if one may express it thus, which in a more or less diffuse fashion, penetrates all Hindu tradition in its actualised form, so that it would be almost impossible to assign it precise and well-defined limits within the latter. And, if one thinks, moreover, that the beginning of the

Kaliyuga goes back far beyond times called 'historical', one must admit that the very origin of Tantrism, far from being as 'late' as some people claim, necessarily evades the limited means at the disposal of profane investigation. Again, when we speak here of origin, making it coincide with the origin of the Kaliyuga, this is only a half truth. More precisely, this is only true on the con-dition that one specifies that it is only a question hereof Tantrism as we would say, an expression or external manifestation of something which, like the rest of the tradition, existed in principle in the Veda itself, although it was only formulated more explicitly and developed in its applications when circumstances came to demand it. One sees, therefore, that there is here a double point of view to be considered; on the one hand, one can find Tantrism even in the Veda, since it is principally included there, but, on the other hand, it can only properly be named as a distinct aspect of the doctrine, from the moment that it was made 'explicit' for the reasons we have indicated, and it is only in this sense that one must consider it as peculiar to the Kaliyuga.

The designation of what is in question derives from the fact that the teachings that constitute its basis are expressed in the treatises that bear the generic name of Tantras, a name that relates directly to the symbolism of weaving that we have spoken of on other occasions, for, in the proper sense, Tantra is the 'chain' of a fabric. And we have remarked that elsewhere also, one finds works of the same significance applied to the Sacred Books. These Tantras are often regarded as forming a 'fifth Veda', specially destined for men of the Kaliyuga; and this would be completely unjustified if they were not, as we explained a moment ago, derived from the Veda, understood in its most rigorous sense, as an adaptation to the conditions of a definite epoch. It is important, moreover, to consider that in reality the Veda is one, principally and in a way 'atemporally', before becoming triple, then quadruple in its formation. Should it perhaps also quintuple in the present age, due to the supplementary development required by our faculties of comprehension being less 'open',

and no longer able to be exercised as directly in the order of pure intellectuality, it is evident that this would not in the least effect its original unity, which is essentially its 'perpetual' (*sanātana*) aspect, and so its being independent of the particular conditions of any age whatsoever.

The doctrine of the Tantras is, and can, in short only, therefore, be a normal development, following certain points of view, of what is already contained in the Veda, since it is in this, and only in this, that it can be, as it is in fact, an integral part of Hindu tradition. And as for the means of 'realisation' (*sādhana*) prescribed by the Tantras, one can say that by this very fact, they are also derived legitimately from the Veda, since they are basically nothing but the application and effective implementation of this same doctrine. If these means, in which we must naturally include, whether it be as principal or mere accessory, rites of every type, appear nevertheless to assume a certain character of 'novelty' in relation to those that preceded them, it is because there was no point in their being envisaged in earlier epochs, except perhaps as pure possibilities, since men had no need of them and availed themselves of other means that suited their nature better. There is here something entirely comparable to what is the special development of a traditional science in this or that epoch, a development that likewise no more constitutes a spontaneous 'apparition' or some 'innovation', since, in this case equally, it can never really be a question of anything but an application of principles, therefore, of something that had in them at least an implicit preexistence, which it was always possible, consequently, to make explicit at any moment, supposing that there had been some reason to do so; but, precisely, this reason is found in fact only in contingent circumstances that condition a definite epoch.

Now, that the strictly 'Vedic' rites such as they were, we want to say, 'at the beginning', are no longer actually practicable, is the result only too clearly of the single fact that *soma*, which played here a capital role, has been lost since a time it is

impossible to evaluate 'historically'. And it is well to understand that, when we speak here of *soma*, it must be considered to represent a whole collection of things, whose knowledge first manifest and accessible to all, has become hidden during the course of the cycle, at least for ordinary humanity. It is necessary, therefore, that there be 'substitutes' for these things, such as might, necessarily, only be found in an order inferior to their own. And this comes back to saying that the 'supports', by whose virtue 'realisation' remained possible, became more and more 'materialised' from one epoch to another, conforming to the descending march of cyclic development. A relationship like that of wine to *soma*, in their ritual usage, could serve as a symbolic example. This 'materialisation' must not, moreover, be understood merely in the most restrained and ordinary sense of the word. As we envisage it, it begins to emerge, one might say, as soon as one leaves that pure knowledge which alone is also pure spirituality. And the call of elements of sentimental and volitional order, for instance, is not the least of the signs of a similar 'materialisation', even if these elements are employed in a legitimate way, that is, if they are only taken as means subordinate to an end which always remain knowledge. For if it were otherwise, one could no longer in anyway talk of 'realisation', but only of a deviation, a semblance or a parody, things which, needless to say, all are rigorously excluded by traditional orthodoxies, in whatever form and at whatever level we may view it.

What we have just indicated applies precisely to Tantrism, whose 'path' generally, appears more 'active' than 'contemplative', or, in other words, situated rather on the side of 'power' than knowledge. And a particularly significant fact, in this respect, is the importance it gives to what is designated as the 'path of the hero' (*vīra-mārga*). It is obvious that *vīrya*, an equivalent term to the Latin *virtus*, at least according to the sense it had before it was changed in a 'moral' direction by the Stoics, properly expresses the essential and in a way 'typical' quality, not of the Brāhmaṇa, but of the Kṣatriya. And the *vīra* differs from the

paśu, that is, from the being subject to the bonds of common existence, less by an effective knowledge than by a voluntary affirmation of 'autonomy', which, at this stage, and, according to the use the being will make of it, can still lead it as much away from its goal as to it. The danger here is, indeed, that the 'power' may be sought for itself, and, thus, become an obstacle instead of a support, and the individual may, thus, come to take himself as his proper end. But it follows naturally that this is only a deviation and an abuse, which never need result, except through misunderstanding, for which the doctrine can in noway be held responsible. And what is more, what we have just said only concerns the 'path' as such, not the goal which, in reality, let us still insist on this, is always the same and can in no case be other than knowledge, since it is only through and in knowledge that the being is truly 'realised' in all its possibilities. It is yet no less true that the means proposed to attain this goal are marked, as they should be inevitably, by the special characteristics of the Kaliyuga. Let us remember, on this subject, that the proper role of the 'hero' is always and everywhere represented as a 'quest', which, if it can be crowned with success, also risks ending in failure. And the 'quest' itself supposes that there is, when the 'hero' appears, something which was lost earlier and that he must rediscover again. This task, at whose termination the *vīra* will become *divya*, may be defined, if one wishes, as the search for *soma* or the 'drink of immortality' (*amṛta*), which is, moreover, from the symbolic point of view, the exact equivalent of what in the West was the 'quest of the Grail'. And, once *soma* is rediscovered, the end of the cycle rejoins its beginning in the 'atemporal'.

Reference

1. Published in *E.T.*, August-September, 1937.

9

Nāma-Rūpa[1]

It is known that, in Hindu tradition, individuality is considered as constituted by the union of two elements, or more exactly of two collections of elements, which are respectively designated by the terms *nāma* and *rūpa*, literally meaning 'name' and 'form'; and generally joined in the composite expression *nāma-rūpa*, which, thus, includes the whole individuality. *Nāma* corresponds to the 'essential' aspect of this individuality, and *rūpa* to its 'substantial' aspect: it is, therefore, almost equivalent to Aristotle's *Eidos* and *Vin*, or to what the scholastics called 'form' and 'matter'. But, here we must beware of a fairly irksome imperfection of Western terminology: 'form', indeed, is then equivalent to *nāma*, while, when one takes the same word in its usual meaning, it is on the contrary *rūpa* that one is obliged to translate as 'form'.[2] The word 'matter' also having its drawbacks, for reasons that we have already explained on other occasions and which we will not repeat now, we find preferable the use of the terms 'essence' and 'substance', naturally taken in a relative sense when they are capable of applying to individuality.

From another somewhat different point of view, *nāma* also corresponds to the subtle part of individuality, and *rūpa* to its corporeal or sensible part. But, basically, this distinction coincides with the preceding one, for it is precisely these two subtle and

corporeal parts which, in the totality of individuality, play, in sum, the role of 'essence' and 'substance' in relation to each other. In all cases, when being is liberated from the individual condition, one may say that it is by this very fact 'beyond name and form', since these two complementary terms are properly constituents of individuality as such. And it should be understood that it is a question hereof a being that has passed to a supra-individual state, for, in another individual state, being still 'formal', it would rediscover necessarily the equivalent of *nāma* and *rūpa*, although the 'form' would no longer then be corporeal as it is in the human state.

Yet one should also say that *nāma* is capable of a certain transposition when it no longer correlates to *rūpa*; this emerges notably when it is said that when survives when a man dies in *nāma*.[3] It is true that one could first think that it is only a question of extracorporeal extensions of human individuality. This way of seeing things is, moreover, acceptable in a certain sense, in so much as *rūpa* identifies with the body. There would then be no real transposition, strictly speaking, but the subtle part of individuality would simply continue to be designated as *nāma* after the disappearance of the corporeal part. It could even still be, thus, when this *nāma* is said to be 'endless', for this can only correspond to cyclic perpetuity. A given cycle can also be said to be 'endless', in the sense that its end analogically rejoins its beginning, as one sees notably by the example of the annual cycle (*samvatsara*).[4] However, it is evidently no longer the same when it is specified that the being that survives as *nāma* has passed to the world of the *devas*,[5] that is to an 'angelic' or supra-individual state. Such a state being 'non-formal', one can no longer speak of *rūpa*, while *nāma* is transposed into a higher meaning, which is possible by virtue of the supra-sensible character which is attached to it even in its ordinary and individual sense. In this case, the being is still 'beyond form', but it would also be 'beyond name' only if it reached the unconditioned state,

and not only a state that, however elevated, still belongs to the domain of manifested existence. We may note that it is doubtless this that is signified, in Western theological doctrines, by the conception according to which angelic nature (*devatva*) is pure 'form' (which may be rendered in Sanskrit as *śuddha-nāma*), that is to say, not bound to 'matter'. Indeed, taking into account the peculiarities of scholastic language pointed out above, this is exactly the same as saying that it is a question of what we call a 'non-formal' state.[6]

In this transposition, *nāma* is still equivalent to the Greek *Eidos* but this time understood in the Platonic sense rather than the Aristotelean sense: it is the 'idea', not in the psychological and 'subjective' sense given to it by the moderns, but in the transcendent sense of 'archetype', that is to say, as reality of the 'intelligible world', of which the 'sensible world' only offers a reflection or a shadow.[7] One can, moreover, in this regard, take the 'sensible world' here as symbolically representing the whole domain of formal manifestation, the 'intelligible world' being that of non-formal, manifestation, that is the world of *devas*. It is also in this sense that one must understand the application of the term *nāma* to the 'ideal' model that the artist must first contemplate internally, and from which he afterwards makes his work real in sensible form, which is properly *rūpa*, so that, when the 'idea' is, thus, 'incorporated', the work of art may be regarded, just like the individual being, as a combination of *nāma* and *rūpa*.[8] There is, thus, so to say, a 'descent' (*avatāra*) of the 'idea' in the formal domain. It is not, of course, that the 'idea' in itself is affected by this, but rather that it is reflected in a certain sensible form which proceeds from it and to which it somehow gives life. We could still say, in this regard, that the 'idea' in itself corresponds to the 'soul'. This simile of the work of art allows us to understand in a more precise way the true nature of the relationship existing between the 'archetype' and the individual, and, consequently, of the relationship of the two

meanings of the term *nāma*, according to whether it is applied in the 'angelic' domain or the human domain. That is to say, whether it designates, on the one hand, the informal or 'spiritual' principle of being, which one can also call its pure 'essence', or on the other hand, the subtle part of individuality, which is 'essence', only in a completely relative sense and in relation to its corporeal part, but which, by virtue of this, represents 'essence' in the individual domain and can, therefore, be considered here as a reflection of the true transcendent 'essence'.

It now remains to explain the symbolism that is inherent in the very terms *nāma* and *rūpa*, and which allows us to go from their literal sense, or their acceptation as 'name' and 'form', to the applications that we just viewed. The relationship can appear more obvious, at first sight, for 'form' than for 'name', perhaps because, in what concerns this 'form', we, briefly, do not leave the sensible order, to which the ordinary meaning of words relates directly. At least, it is, thus, when it has to do with human existence. And should it have to do with another individual state, it would be sufficient to remember that there must necessarily be a certain correspondence between the constitution of the being manifest in this state, and of the individual human, for the reason that it is always a 'formal' state that is in question. On the other hand, clearly to understand the true significance of *nāma*, we must call upon less commonly widespread notions, and must remember primarily that, as we have already explained elsewhere, the 'name' of a being, even taken literally is an effective expression of its 'essence'. This 'name' is, moreover, also a 'number' in the Pythagorean and Kabbalistic sense, and one knows that, even simply from the point of view of historical filiation, the conception of the Platonic 'idea' that we spoke of a moment ago, is closely connected to the 'idea' of the Pythagorean 'number'.

This is not all: it is important to note again that the 'name' in the literal sense, is properly a sound, and, therefore, belongs to

the auditory order, whilst 'form' belongs to the visual order. Here the 'eye' (or sight) is, therefore, taken as symbol of sensible experience while the 'ear' (or hearing) is taken as symbol of the 'angelic' or intuitive intellect.[9] And it is equally, thus, that the 'revelation', or direct intuition of intelligible truths is represented as an 'audition' (hence, the traditional significance of the word *śruti*).[10] It naturally follows that, in themselves, hearing and sight equally rise from the sensible domain. But, for their symbolic transposition, when they are, thus, placed in relation to each other, there is to be viewed a certain hierarchy between them, which results from the order of development of the elements, and consequently of the sensible qualities that relate to them respectively. The auditory quality, relating to ether, which is the first of the elements, is more 'primordial' than the visual quality, which relates to fire. And one sees that, thence, the meaning of the term *nāma* is bound in a direct way to traditional ideas, which have in Hindu doctrine a really fundamental character. We refer to the 'primordiality of sound', and the 'perpetuity of the Veda'.

References

1. Published in *E.T.*, March 1940.
2. In English, we may to a certain point avoid the ambiguity by agreeing to render scholastic 'form' as *form*, and 'form' in the ordinary sense as *shape*; but, in French, it is impossible to find two words allowing a similar distinction.
3. *Bṛhadāraṇyaka Upaniṣad*, III.2.12.
4. *Jaiminīya Upaniṣad Brāhmaṇa*, I.35.
5. Ibid., III.9.
6. It is no less true that angelic nature, like all that is manifested, necessarily comprises a mixture of 'act' and 'power'. Certain people appear to have purely and simply assimilated these two terms to 'form' and 'matter', which indeed do correspond to them, but which normally have a more limited meaning. And these differences of terminology are capable of creating certain points of confusion.

7. We will recall here the symbolism of Plato's cave.
8. On this point, and also for a good part of other considerations shown in this article, see Ananda K. Coomaraswamy, 'The Part of Art in Indian Life,' in the Commemorative Collection of Shri Ramakrishna's centenary, *The Cultural Heritage of India*, vol. III, pp. 485-513.
9. Cf. *Bṛhadāraṇyaka Upaniṣad*, I.4.17.
10. It must be added nevertheless that, in certain cases, sight and its organ can also symbolise intellectual intuition (the 'eye of knowledge' in Hindu tradition, or the 'eye of the heart' in Islamic tradition). But it is then a question of another aspect of the symbolism of light, and consequently of 'visibility' different from the one we have to consider at present, for in this latter there primarily intervene the relationships of sight and hearing, or corresponding sensible qualities. We must always remember that traditional symbolism is never 'systematic'.

10

Māyā[1]

DR. A.K. Coomaraswamy recently observed[2] that it is preferable to translate *māyā* as 'art' rather than 'illusion', as is done most commonly. This translation indeed corresponds with a point of view that might be called more principal. He who produces manifestation by means of his 'art' is the divine architect, and the world is his 'work of art'; as such, the world is neither more nor less unreal than our own works of art, which, because of their relative impermanence, are also unreal if one compares them to the art that 'resides' in the artist. The chief danger of the use of the word 'illusion', indeed, is that one risks too often making it synonymous with 'unreality', understood in an absolute fashion, that is, considering things said to be illusory as only being a pure and simple nothingness, whilst it is only a question of different degrees in reality; but we shall return later to this point. For the moment, we shall add on this subject that the fairly frequent translation of *māyā* as 'magic', which some have tried to base on a totally verbal, external similarity, and which results, in fact, from no etymological kinship, appears to us strangely influenced by that Western prejudice which wants magic to have only purely imaginary effects, lacking in any reality, and so repeats the same error. In any case, even for those who recognise the reality, in their relative order, of the phenomena produced by magic, there is obviously no more reason to attribute

to the productions of divine 'art' a specially 'magic' character, than to restrict in any other way the scope of the symbolism that assimilates them to 'works of art' taken in their most general sense.[3]

'*Māyā* is the material 'power' (*śakti*) through which divine understanding acts; more precisely still, it is *kriyā-śakti*, that is 'divine activity', which is *icchā-śakti*. As such, it is inherent to Brahmā Himself, or to the Supreme Principle. It is therefore, situated at an incomparably higher level than *prakṛti*, and if the latter is also called *māyā*, notably in the Sāṁkhya, this is because it is in reality but the reflection of this *śakti* in the 'cosmological' order.[4] One may, moreover, note here the application of the inverse sense of the analogy, the Supreme Activity reflecting in pure passivity, and the principal 'omnipotence' in the potentiality of the *materia prima*. Furthermore, *māyā*, by the very fact that it is the divine 'art' that resides in the Principle, is also identified with 'wisdom', *sophia*, understood, in exactly the same sense as the Judeo-Christian tradition, and, as such, is the mother of *avatāra*. It is so, primarily, as to its eternal generation, inasmuch as it is *śakti* of the Principle, which is, moreover, but one with the Principle Itself, of which it is but the 'maternal' aspect.[5] And it is so also, as to its birth in the manifested world, inasmuch as it is *prakṛti*, which shows even more clearly the connection existing between these two higher and lower aspect of *māyā*.[6]

We may make another remark, directly connected to what has just been said of divine 'art', concerning the meaning of the 'veil of *māyā*': this is primarily the 'tissue' of which is made the manifestation of weaving we spoke of before, and although one generally seems not to take account of it, this meaning is indicated very clearly in certain representations, where various beings belonging to manifested world are represented upon this veil. It is, therefore, only secondarily that this veil at the same time appears to hide or somehow envelop the Principle, and this because the unfurling of the manifestation conceals it from our

eyes. This point of view, that of manifested beings, is, moreover, inverse to the principal point of view, for it makes manifestation appear 'external' in relation to the Principle, while it can in reality only be 'internal', since nothing can exist in anyway outside of the Principle which, by the very fact that it is infinite, necessarily contains all things in itself.[3]

This brings us to the question of illusion: what is properly illusory is the point of view that makes us consider manifestation as external to the Principle: and it is in this sense that the illusion is also 'Ignorance' (*avidyā*), that is to say, precisely the opposite, or the inverse, of the 'Wisdom' we spoke of above. This, one may say, is the other face of *māyā*, but only on the understanding that one adds that this face only exists as a consequence of the erroneous way we view its productions. The latter really are other than what they seem to be, for they all expresses something of the Principle, as every work of art expresses something of its author, and in this consists all their realites. This, therefore, is only a dependent and 'shared' reality, which can be seen to be nothing in light of the absolute reality of the Principle,[4] but which is no less real in itself for that. The illusion can, therefore, if one wishes, be understood in two different senses, either as a false appearance that things take in relation to us, or as the unreality of even these things in relation to the Principle. But, in both cases, it necessarily implies a real foundation, and consequently, it can never be in anyway assimilated with pure nothingness.

References

1. Published in *E.T.*, July-August, 1947.
2. Book review of the posthumous book of Heinrich Zimmer, *Myths and Symbols in Indian Art and Civilization*, in *The Review of Religion*, March 1947.
3. It is clearly understood that this sense must be in conformity with the traditional conception of art, and not with the 'aesthetic' theories of the moderns.

4. In Western terminology, one may say here that one must not confuse *Natura naturans* with *Natura naturata*, although both are termed *Natura*.
5. Kṛṣṇa said: 'Although without birth...I am born of my own *māyā*.' *Bhagavadgītā*, IV.6.
6. Cf. *The Great Triad*, ch. I, final part; it must be clearly understood on this subject that Christian tradition, which does not clearly view the 'maternal' aspect in the Principle itself, can only take, at least explicitly, regarding its conception of Theotokos, the second of the two points of view that we just indicated. As Dr. Coomaraswamy says, 'it is not by accident that the name of Buddha's mother is Māyā' (similarly among the Greek, Maria is the mother of Hermes). It is upon this also that rests the parallel that certain people have wanted to draw between the names Māyā and Maria.
7. *The Symbolism of the Cross*, ch. XIV.
8. Dr. Coomaraswamy recalls in this regard a remark made by St. Augustine: 'Quo comparata nec pulchra, nec bona, nec sunt,' *Confessions*, XI.4.

11

Sanātana Dharma[1]

THE notion of *sanātana dharma* is one of those that has no exact equivalent in the West, so that it appears impossible to find a term or expression that would render it wholly and in all its aspects. Every translation that one might propose for it would be, if not completely false, at least most inadequate. Ananda K. Coomaraswamy thought that the expression that could perhaps best give at least its approximation was *Philosophia perennis*, taken in the sense in which it was understood in the Middle Ages. This is indeed true in certain regards, but there are nevertheless notable differences, and it is all the more useful to examine them, as some people seem too easily to believe in the possibility of a pure and simple assimilation of these two notions together.

We must remark first of all that the difficulty does not hinge on the translation of the word *sanātana*, for which the Latin *perennis* is really the equivalent. It is properly a question here of 'perenniality' or perpetuity, and not at all of eternity as is sometimes said. Indeed this term *sanātana* implies an idea of duration, while eternity, conversely, is essentially 'non-duration'. The duration in question is, if you wish, indefinite, or more precisely 'cyclic', in the sense of the Greek *aionios*, which no longer has the meaning of 'eternal' that the moderns, through a

regrettable confusion, too often attribute to it. What is perpetual in this sense is what constantly survives from the beginning to the end of a cycle. And, following Hindu tradition, the cycle that must be viewed in what concerns *sanātana dharma* is a *manvantara*, that is, the duration of manifestation of a terrestrial humanity. We should add immediately, for we shall see its full importance later on, that *sanātana* also has the meaning 'primordial' and it is, moreover, easy to understand its very direct link with this sense, since what is truly perpetual can be nothing but that which goes back to the very origin of the cycle. Finally, it must be clearly understood that this perpetuity, with the stability it necessarily implies, though not in anyway to be confused with eternity, with which it has no common measure, is, however, like a reflection, in our world, of the eternity and immutability which appertain to those principles themselves of which *sanātana dharma* is the expression, in relation to our world.

The word *perennis*, in itself, can also include all we have just explained. But it would be fairly difficult to say to what degree the scholastics of the Middle Ages, to whose language the term *Philosophia perennis* more particularly pertains, could have had a clear awareness of it, because their point of view, while being evidently traditional, nevertheless only extended to an external domain and, hence, limited for multiple considerations. Whatever the case, and admitting that one may, independently of all historical considerations, restore to this word the fullness of its meaning, what remains nonetheless a cause for more serious reservations than the assimilation of which we have just spoken, is the use of the term *Philosophia*, which corresponds in a certain way precisely to this limitation from the scholastic point of view. First, this word, being normally given the use the moderns habitually employ, all too easily gives way to these equivocations. One can, it is true, dissipate them by taking care to specify that *Philosophia perennis* is not by any means 'one' philosophy, that

is to say, one particular conception, more or less limited and systematic, and having as author such and such an individual, but the common fund from which proceeds whatever is truly valid in all philosophies. And this way of viewing it would certainly correspond, in fact, to the thought of the scholastics. Only, there would still be an impropriety here, for what is in question, if it is considered an authentic expression of truth, as it must be, would be *Sophia* rather than *Philosophia*. 'Wisdom' must not be confused with the aspiration that strives for it, or the quest that may lead to it, and these are all the word 'philosophy' properly designates, following its etymology itself. One perhaps will say that it is capable of a certain transposition, and although the latter does not appear to us to be necessary, as it would be if one really had no better term at one's disposal, we do not intend to contest its possibility. But even in the most favourable case, it still would be very far from being able to be considered an equivalent for dharma, for it could only ever designate a doctrine which, whatever the breadth of the domain is, *infact*, would embrace and remain in any case solely theoretical, and which, consequently, would in no way correspond to all that is included in the traditional point of view, in its entirety. In the latter, infact, doctrine is never viewed as a simple theory sufficient in itself, but as a knowledge which must be effectively realised, and, moreover, it involves applications stretching to all modalities of human life, without exception.

This extension results from the very meaning of the word *dharma*, which is as anyway impossible to render wholly by a single term in Western languages. By its root *dhri*, which means 'to carry, support, sustain, maintain,' it primarily designates the principle of preservation of beings, and consequently of stability, at least so far as the latter is compatible with the conditions of manifestation. It is important to observe that the root *dhri* is almost identical, as form and as meaning, with another root *dhru*, from which is derived the word *dhruva* which designates 'pole':

it is effectively to this idea of 'pole' or 'axis' of the manifested world that one must refer if one wishes to understand the notion of dharma in its deepest sense. It is what remains invariable at the centre of the revolutions of all things, and which rules the course of change by the very fact that it does not take part in it. One must not forget, in this regard, that language, by the synthetic character of the thought it expresses, is much more closely bound to symbolism, here, than it is in modern languages, where such a link no longer survives in a certain measure except by virtue of a distant derivation. And perhaps one might even show, if this did not depart too much from our subject, that this notion of dharma is connected fairly directly to the symbolic representation of the 'axis', through the figure of the 'Tree of the World'.

One might say that dharma, if one had to view it, thus, only in principle, is necessarily *sanātana*; and even in a broader sense than the one that we indicated above, since, instead of being limited to a certain cycle and to the beings there manifested, it applies equally to all beings and to all their states of manifestation. We rediscover indeed here the idea of permanence and stability. But it naturally follows that this idea, outside of which there can be no question at all of dharma, can nevertheless be applied, in a relative way, to different levels and in more or less limited domains, and this is what justifies all the secondary or 'specialised' meanings of which this same term is capable. By the very fact that it must be conceived as the principle of preservation of beings, dharma resides, for these, in the conformity with their essential nature. One can, therefore, speak in this sense, of the dharma proper to every being, which is more precisely designated as *svadharma*, or to every category of beings, as well as of the dharma of a world or state of existence, or only of a definite portion of it, of the dharma of a certain people or a certain period; and when one speaks of *sanātana dharma*, as we have said, it is then a question of the entirety of humanity, and this during all the duration of its manifestation, which constitutes

a *manvantara*. One can still say, in this case, that is the 'law' or the 'norm' proper to this cycle, formulated from its origin; by Manu who governs it, that is to say, by the cosmic intelligence that reflects the Divine Will, and expresses universal order in it. And this is, in principle, the true sense of *mānava-dharma*, independently of all particular adaptations that could be derived from it, and which moreover, will receive legitimately the same designation, because they will be, in sum, quite as these translations require by such and such circumstances of time and place. One must nevertheless add that, in like fashion, it could happen that the very idea of 'law', in fact, brings a certain restriction, for although it can, as is true for its Hebrew equivalent *thorak*, also be applied by extension to the contents of the whole body of Sacred Writings, what it makes one think of most immediately is naturally the 'legislative' aspect, properly called, which certainly is far from constituting the whole tradition, although it is an integral part in every civilisation which can be qualified normal. This aspect, though in reality only an application to the social order, like all the other such applications necessarily presupposes the purely metaphysical doctrine which is the essential and fundamental part of the tradition, the principal knowledge upon which all the rest wholly depends and without which nothing really traditional, in whatever domain it be, could exist at all.

We have spoken of the Universal Order, which in manifestation is, the expression of the Divine Will, and which assumes in each state of existence particular modalities determined by the conditions proper to this state. Dharma may, under a certain aspect of at least, be defined as conformity to order, and this is what explains the close kinship existing between this notion of *ṛta*, which is also order and etymologically has the sense of 'rectitude', like *te* in Far Eastern traditions with which Hindu dharma has much in common, and which also obviously harks back to the idea of 'axis', which is that of a constant and invariable direction. At the same time, this term *ṛta* is manifestly identical

to the word *rite*, and in its primitive meaning the letter does, indeed, designate all that is accomplished in conformity to order. In any integrally traditional civilisation, and most especially at the very beginning, everything has a properly ritual character *rite* only comes to have a more limited meaning as a consequence of the degeneration that produces 'profane' activity, in whatever domain it be. All distinction between 'sacred' and 'profane' supposes, indeed, that certain things are viewed henceforth outside of the traditional point of view, whereas the latter applies equally to all; and these things, by the very fact that they are considered 'profane' truly become *adharma* or *anṛta*. It must be clearly understood that *rite*, which then corresponds to 'sacred', by contrast always conserves the same *dhārmika* character, if one may express it, thus, and represents what still remains as it was prior to this degeneration; and that it is non-ritual activity that is really only deviant or abnormal activity. In particular, all that which is mere 'convention' or 'custom', without any profound reason, and of a purely human institution, did not exist originally and is only the product of a deviation. And *rite*, traditionally viewed as it should be to deserve this name, has absolutely no relation, whatever some people might think, with all this, which can never be but its counterfeit or parody. Moreover, and this is yet another essential point, when we speak hereof conformity to order, one must not understand by this only the human order, but also, and even primarily, the cosmic order. In every traditional conception, indeed, there is always a strict correspondence between them, and it is precisely *rite* that preserves their relations in a conscious fashion, implying in someway collaboration from man in that sphere where he exercises his activity, the cosmic order itself.

It follows from this that, if one views *sanātana dharma* as integral tradition, it includes principally all branches of human activity, which are moreover 'transformed' by it, since, by virtue of this integration, they share the 'non-human' character that is

inherent in all traditions, or which, more precisely, constitutes the very essence of tradition as such. It is, therefore, the exact opposite of 'humanism', that is the point of view that claims to reduce everything to the purely human level, and which, basically, is at one with the profane point of view itself. And this is where, most notably, the traditional conception of the sciences and of the arts differs profoundly from their profane conception, to such a point that one might say, without exaggeration, that it is separated from it by a veritable abyss. From the traditional point of view, every science and every art is only really valid and legitimate so far as it is connected to universal principles, so that they appear most definitively as an application of fundamental doctrine in a certain contingent order, just as the legislation and social organisation are also an application in another domain. By this participation with the essence of tradition, science and art, also have, in all their modes of operation, that ritual character we spoke of earlier, and of which no activity is devoid so long as it remains what it should be normally. And we will add that there is, from this point of view, no distinction to be made between arts and crafts, which traditionally are one and the same thing. We cannot here insist further on all these considerations developed already on other occasions. But we think that we have at least said enough to show how all this goes beyond 'philosophy' in all respects, in whatever sense it may be understood.

Now, it should be easy to understand what *sanātana dharma* really is: it is nothing but Primordial tradition, which alone survives continuously without change through all the *manvantara*, and, thus, possesses cyclic perpetuity, because its very primordiality shields it from the vicissitudes of successive epochs, and which alone also can in all strictness, be regarded as truly and fully integral. Moreover, owing to the descending course of the cycle, and spiritual obscuration that then results, this Primordial tradition has become hidden and inaccessible to ordinary humanity. It is the first source and the common fund of all particular traditional

forms, which proceed from it by adaptation to special conditions of such a people or such an epoch; though none of these can be identified with *sanātana dharma* itself, or be considered as an adequate expression of it, which, however, is always in them as a more or less veiled image. Every orthodox tradition is a reflection and, we might say, a 'substitute' for Primordial tradition, in the measure permitted by contingent circumstances, so that, although it is not *sanātana dharma*, it nevertheless represents it truly for those who adhere to it and share in it effectively. For they cannot attain it except through it, and since, moreover, it expresses, if not the integrality, at least all that directly concerns them, and this in the form is the most appropriate for their individual nature. In a certain sense, all these various traditional forms are principally contained in *sanātana dharma*. For they are so many regular and legitimate adaptations of it, and even in any single one of those developments of which they are capable in the course of time there never could be anything else, at depth. And in another sense, inverse and complementary to this, they all contain *sanātana dharma* as something most inner and 'central' in them, being, in their different degrees of externality, like veils that conceal it, and only let it transfuse in a more or less attenuated and partial fashion.

This being true for all traditional forms, it would be a mistake to wish to assimilate *sanātana dharma* purely and simply with one among them, whatever that might be, moreover, even the Hindu tradition, in terms of which it actually presents itself to us. And, if this mistake is sometimes committed, in fact, it can only be by those whose horizons, owing to the circumstances in which they find themselves, are exclusively limited to this tradition alone. If, however, this assimilation is legitimate to a certain degree, following what we have just explained, the followers of each of the other traditions could also say, in the same sense and with the same right, that their own tradition is *sanātana dharma*. Such an affirmation would always be true in

a relative sense, although it obviously false in the absolute sense. There is, however, a reason why the notion of *sanātana dharma* appears to be bound more particularly to the Hindu tradition. This is because the latter is, of all the presently living traditional forms, the one that most directly derives from Primordial tradition, being somehow a sort of external continuation of it, always taking into account, of course, the conditions in which the human cycle unfurls, of which it itself presents a more complete description than all those one might find elsewhere, so that it, thus, shares to a lighter degree that all other in its perpetuity. Besides, it is interesting to note that the Hindu tradition and the Islamic tradition are the only ones that explicitly affirm the validity of all the other orthodox traditions. And if this is so, it is because, being the first and the last in the course of the *manvantara*, they must equally integrate, although in different modes, all these various forms which have arisen in the interval, so as to render possible a 'return to the origins' by which the end of the cycle must rejoin its beginning, and which, at the starting point of another *manvantara*, the true *sanātana dharma* will again externally manifest.

We must still point out two misconceptions which are only too widespread in our epoch, and which witness to a certainly much more serious and complete misunderstanding than the assimilation of *sanātana dharma* to a particular traditional form. One of these misconceptions is that of the so-called 'reformers', as is encountered today even in India itself. There are those who believe they are able to rediscover *sanātana dharma* by instituting a sort of more less arbitrary simplification of tradition, which corresponds in reality only to their own individual tendencies, and which most often betrays prejudices due to the influence of the modern Western spirit. It must be noted that, generally, what these 'reformers' apply themselves primarily to eliminate either because it eludes them entirely, or because it runs counter to their preconceived ideas, is precisely what has the most profound

significance. And this attitude is roughly comparable to that of the 'critics' who reject as 'interpolations' everything in a text that does not agree with the idea they have of it or with the meaning they wish to find there. When we speak of a 'return to the origins', as we did a moment ago, it is assuredly of something else we speak, and something which, moreover, does not depend in anyway on the initiative of individuals as such. One does not see at all why Primordial tradition should be thought simple, as these people claim, unless it be that, by infirmity or intellectual weakness, one wishes it to be thus. And why should the truth be obliged to accommodate the mediocrity of the faculties of comprehension of average actual men? To realise that there is no reason, it suffices to understand, on the one hand that *sanātana dharma* contains all that is expressed through all traditional forms, without exception, with something more also, and that, on the other hand, that these are necessarily truths of the highest and most profound order that have become the more inaccessible through the fact of the spiritual and intellectual obscuration inherent in the cyclic descent. Under these conditions, the simplicity cherished by the modernists of every type is evidently as far as possible from constituting a mark of the antiquity of a traditional doctrine, and with even greater reason, of its primordiality.

The other misconception to which we would draw attention primarily belongs to the various contemporary schools which adhere to what one has agreed to call 'occultism'. These schools habitually proceed by 'syncretism', that is to say, by bringing together the various traditions, so far as they can know them, in a completely external and superficial fashion, not even in order to try to disengage what they have in common, but only to somehow juxtapose elements borrowed from each of them on the other. And the result of these constructions, as odd as they are whimsical, is presented as the expression of an 'ancient wisdom' or of an 'archaic doctrine' whence all traditions would

issue, and which become, thus, identified with the Primordial tradition, or to *sanātana dharma* although these terms themselves seem, moreover, almost ignored by the schools concerned. It naturally follows that all this, whatever be the pretensions, could not have the least value, and only responds to a purely profane point of view, the more so since these conceptions are accompanied almost invariably by a total failure to grasp the necessity of adhering above all to a definite tradition, for anyone wanting to penetrate the spiritual domain to any depth whatever. And it is well to understand that we wish to speak hereof an affective adhesion, with all the consequences that this implies, including the practice of that rites of this tradition, and not only of a vague 'ideal' sympathy like the one that leads certain Westerners to declare themselves to be Hindu or Buddhist without knowing clearly what this is; and in any case, without even ever thinking of acquiring a real and regular attachment to these traditions. This is nonetheless the point of departure which no one can dispense with, and it is only afterwards that everyman can, according to the measure of his capacities, seek to go further. It is never a question hereof speculations in a vacuum, but of knowledge that must essentially be directed with a view to spiritual realisation. It is only from there, from within their traditions, and we might even speak more exactly again of their very centre, should one succeeds in reaching it, that one can really become aware of what constitutes their essential and fundamental unity, therefore, truly attain the full knowledge of *sanātana dharma*.

Reference

1. Published in the *Books of the South*, special issue, *Approaches of India*, 1949.